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THE WORD

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

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WELCOMING REMARKS

TO THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS

held at Saints Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, Potomac, Maryland October 2, 2021, following Vespers



Beloved Brother in Christ and Chairman of our Assembly, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS, Beloved Brother Hierarchs of the Assembly, Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Welcome to our church of Saints Peter and Paul, here in Potomac, Maryland.

I want to thank Father Luke Toumi and all our parishioners who have labored to host us for Vespers tonight and to provide us with hospitality. Their generosity is an icon for us of the love and service that distinguish the people of Christ, for He said, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you maintain love for one another” (1 John 13:35).

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

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, only by maintaining humble love like our Lord's can we achieve the unity to which we are called, as one Body in Christ. This is no easy task, since there are so many temptations that drive us apart. Yet we have at least been trying to realize it, and we must continue to try. Our people are looking to us to lead them into unity; and, especially in this Year of Youth, we are reminded how our young people long for a vision of the Church that rises above ethnic parochialism and political division to radiate hope and life to the world.

We all know how the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, patrons of this church, met in council with the other apostles and struggled for a unity rooted in the gospel. Later, Saint Peter summed up the spirit of love which enabled the apostles to preserve unity, writing in his first epistle: "Finally, all of you, be of the same mind, sympathetic, loving the brethren, tenderhearted, and humble-minded" (1 Peter 3:8). Let us strive to imitate this unifying, humble love. Only by acquiring the mind of Christ can we overcome destructive disagreement. Only with sympathy, love, and a tender heart can we break down any barriers of enmity that might arise between us. And only through humility can we open our lives and our ministries to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I pray that our upcoming meetings will be fruitful and that this miraculous unity to which we are called may shine forth from our deliberations and our ministries.

+Metropolitan JOSEPH



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

A HOMILY ON JOHN 4:5–42, GIVEN AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH BY
FR. HARMON ON MAY 30, 2021

Back in the late 1970's, the Pittsburgh Pirates were about the best team in baseball for several years. They won the World Series in 1979. The team leader was Willie Stargell, called "Pops" by the other players. That team was close-knit, highly focused, and very united. They called themselves "The Family" – they played well together and they got along



great. Years later, Willie Stargell reminisced about "The Family," saying, "We won games, we lived, and we enjoyed as *one*. We molded together dozens of different individuals into *one* working force. We were all from different races and different economic backgrounds, but in the clubhouse and on the field, we were *one*" (*Our Daily Bread*, August 14, 2002).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the whole world were like that? All different, but united? A *family* like the 1979 Pirates? But it's obviously not that way! Instead of the human race being united, we fuss and fight all the time.

Now, in and of themselves, differences are fine. In fact, the world would be dull if we were all the



same color, spoke the same language, ate the same food, had the same customs, and were alike in every way. Boring! But when differences lead to anger and fighting, that's obviously not good.

This is especially true for worshippers of Jesus Christ! More than anyone else, we should be united, we should be *family*. The Lord Jesus Christ came to our world to break down the barriers that divide people. We heard perhaps the most dramatic example of that in today's gospel reading from John 4.

Jesus and the Twelve needed to travel from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. Smack dab in the middle was the area of Samaria. The Samaritans hated the Jews and the Jews hated the Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be "half-breeds" – and it's true that they were a mixed people with both Hebrew and Gentile backgrounds. The Jews considered the Samaritans' religion to be false: they believed in one God, but their beliefs were somewhat different from the Jews'.

The two groups avoided each other and even tried not to have to speak to each other. We heard about that in today's reading in verse 9. If a Jew had to travel from the north to the south, or vice-versa, he would take a big detour to go around Samaria. This wasn't the type of detour that would add a half-

hour to your trip – it would add days! And if for some reason a Jew just had to travel through Samaria, he would go fast, talk to no one, and carry enough food and water so that he wouldn't have to buy anything in Samaria.

Jesus wasn't like that. He loved the Samaritans because He loved all people. So He took the Twelve along on the trip and just strolled right through the middle of Samaria! He sought contact with the Samaritans instead of avoiding them. Our gospel reading told us how He sent the disciples into the city of Sychar to buy Samaritan bread from a Samaritan baker. And He was thirsty and so He asked a Samaritan woman to get Him some water from a well.

Most Jews avoided all dealing with Samaritans. Jesus? He tried to get as much contact with them as possible! He saw in the woman by the well a *soul* to save. So He started a conversation with her, the longest conversation in the New Testament.

Through this long conversation, the Lord led the Samaritan woman to repent of her immoral lifestyle (she was shacking up with her sixth man in a row) and to believe that He was the Messiah. That very day she started bringing other Samaritans to belief in Jesus Christ! Church tradition says that later, when she was baptized, she was given a new name: *Photine*, which means "light." She became a missionary, traveling through the Roman Empire sharing the light of Christ. She was a brave woman and years later even tried to convert the wicked King Nero. She did not succeed – and he killed her. The beautiful missionary, the Samaritan woman, became a martyr and a beautiful Saint.

This came about all because Jesus Christ ignored the barrier, the hatred, between Jews and Samaritans. He talked to her; He saved her. And He united Jews and Samaritans together in His Church. There was still a tougher barrier to come, which the early Church, had to work on tearing down after Jesus returned to heaven: the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. If you read the book of Acts and St. Paul's letters, you'll see that gradually that barrier came down, too. The result was that the Church, our Church, was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Not all the Jews became Christians. Not all the Gentiles became Christians. Those who did, however, were united by God to be a new people, the people of Christ, "Christians."

St. Paul struggled hard for this to happen and he was so happy about it! He expressed his joy in

Ephesians 2:14: “For He (Jesus Christ) is our peace who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.” Those of all nationalities were united together in the ancient Orthodox Church. St. Justin Martyr, around 150 A.D., wrote about how those who used to hate each other now loved each other: “We, who once hated each other, and tried to destroy each other..., now since Christ has come, we live together and we eat together and we pray for our enemies.”¹ It was truly a wonderful thing!

But in our two-thousand-year history as the Church of our Lord, sometimes we’ve blown it. Sometimes we’ve put barriers back up. Sometimes we’ve fallen into racism, or ethnic or national hatred, or elitism. There’s a bad example of this from Britain around 700 A.D. The members of the Briton nationality had already been Christians for a few hundred years. Then the Saxon tribes moved in and were soon converted to Christ. The two groups, however, although in the same Faith, didn’t get along too well. Thank God, they did have liturgy together, but at their meals afterward, it wasn’t so good. The Britons would all sit on one side of the church hall while the Saxons would sit on the other side. And when the meal was over, the Britons would stay behind after the Saxons left. They would thoroughly scrub the Saxon area and, if there was food there the Saxons hadn’t eaten? They would take it outside and feed it to the dogs so as to never accidentally eat anything “contaminated” by contact with the Saxons!²

Obviously, the unity there was a bit weak! It shouldn’t be that away among Christ’s people. We should not judge by appearances, not “judge a book by its cover.” We should get to know our brothers and sisters in Christ as *individuals*, not as members of a certain nationality or group. And then we’ll find out, we all have the same problems, the same joys. The same red blood flows in all our veins. And we have the same Lord.

Christ came and broke down the barriers, as we saw in John 4. And His Church continued doing that, sometimes successfully, sometimes not so successfully. Yet the busting of barriers is still going on in our Church. This struck me some years back at one of our Archdiocese’s Clergy Symposiums at the Antiochian Village. Every other year, all the clergy in the Archdiocese from the U.S. and Canada get together for a week of learning, fellowship, and

worship. If you get lots of priests together, you can imagine there are going to be lots of church services – lots! The chapel is packed and overflowing; many have to stand in the narthex. Now not all priests are great singers, but when you pack that many in a room and turn them loose, the singing is wonderful as we all worship God together. Some of the best singing priests serve as chanters at these services. One day, some years back, the two priests chanting were totally different from each other in many ways. One was an elderly man from Lebanon, a life-long Orthodox, educated in Lebanon, with an Arabic accent. The other was a younger priest, who had grown up in America, and a convert from Protestantism. Very different in surface ways, but as they sang together, their voices (although very different from each other) blended together in wonderful heart-felt worship of Jesus Christ. Yes, they were very different from each other, but they were one in the Lord.

God has blessed our parish in this regard. We are privileged to have together in one congregation, one family, people from all kinds of backgrounds. Different nationalities, different accents, different backgrounds. All different, and yet all get along wonderfully as one family in Christ! And all together beautifully sing praises to the Lord!

Jesus Christ came to break down the sinful barriers our human race had built up. John 4 tells us how He knocked down the wall between Jews and Samaritans. May we, His people, continue that work. In Christ, our nationality, our color, our accent, are all very secondary. They don’t really matter in comparison to what’s really important, because for us, what really matters is our *true* nationality: we are Christians, people of Christ.

St. Paul was part of the struggle to break down the barriers, and he was overjoyed when he saw the barriers coming down. Let us close by looking at two verses where his joy breaks forth: Galatians 3:27–28. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

1. *First Apology*, Part xxiii, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1 (Eerdmans).

2. Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 103.

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

Encyclical for the Year of Youth

Beloved Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you in the Name of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Seven years ago, I received the staff of archpastoral service from our Father in Christ, Patriarch John X, accepting a grave responsibility for shepherding the souls of this God-protected Archdiocese. By your prayers, I worked diligently to navigate the stormy waters of the global pandemic, and now I must turn our focus to restoring the fullness of liturgical and spiritual life in our parishes.

A Fire Bell in the Night

During my travels throughout the Archdiocese, both before the pandemic and now that I have resumed archpastoral visits, there is one issue that continues to ring out (to borrow an apt phrase from Thomas Jefferson) as a fire bell in the night: our young people leaving the Church. During just about every parish visit, Archdiocese Board meeting, clergy gathering, Parish Life Conference, and Archdiocese Convention, I am asked about our young people: What are we doing for them? How can we keep them in the Church? What new programs can we offer? What curriculum can we create? Since the start of the pandemic, these concerns have been expressed with even greater intensity, as many of our youth and young families are still absent from the life of the Church.

After reflecting upon these difficult questions over the past seven years, I offer a few questions of my own: What if these are the wrong questions? What if our fixation on new programs and curricula is blinding us to a deeper need? What if our anxiety about keeping young people engaged in organizations is misdirected?

Ultimately, it seems to me, there is a fundamental question we may be taking for granted: do our young people know the Crucified and Risen Lord?

The Need for Dialogue

In view of the great responsibility of my office, I must do everything I can to address these questions. As a first step, several months ago, I asked my fellow hierarchs in the Assembly of Bishops to declare this the Year of Youth for Orthodox Christians in our land. I now write this encyclical to share some insights I have gleaned from praying and thinking about how we should respond to this great crisis of our time. I hope to begin a dialogue within our Archdiocese—a dialogue not *about* our youth but *with* our youth.

When I am asked about our young people, the questions often come from a place of confusion or misunderstanding—as though we are talking not about the children nurtured in our homes and parishes but about some exotic group of strangers! We do not understand their habits of thought, ways of communicating, and systems of values. On the other hand, when I speak to our youth and young adults, I often hear their own sense of alienation from the “adult” world of their parishes. Over and over again, I hear our young people talk about being set aflame in their faith by an experience of camp or by an inspiring retreat, only to have that flame extinguished by apathetic religiosity in their home. Moreover, they tell me how their desire for inclusion in ministries is often greeted with coldness by older people who cling to those roles and their enthusiasm for new ideas is often met with cynicism by those who insist that things be done as they always have been. How can we engage young people with the Gospel if we do not make the effort to understand them and intentionally embrace them as full members of the Church?

We must all remember that the Church is one Body of Christ which encompasses all of us as members—young and old alike. As St. Paul reminds us, every part of the Body has its function, and no one part can dismiss the role of the others: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:21). Our young people need the guidance and mentorship of their elders, and our older generation needs the enthusiasm and idealism of our young people. In short, we all need each other; and, most importantly, we all need our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body. We need to draw upon the love and humility of Christ in order to work with one another, heal one another, and rejoice in one another. Our way forward is not in alienation but in communion, not in judgment but in forgiveness, not in lecturing but in listening.

The dialogue I am calling for will not be easy. Our Lord teaches that “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32), yet He also warns that the world loves darkness rather than the Light (John 3:19). Honest conversation will bring to light things we may rather leave unspoken and reveal truths we may wish to deny. Yet, as the Savior said to the Samaritan Woman, “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23). True service to God comes from a place of transparent openness, and we cannot serve Him truly until we face all the difficult truths in our lives.

Our Priorities Teach More Than Programs

One truth we must face head-on is that we cannot merely plan ourselves out of this crisis, by hiring a charismatic youth director, by designing the perfect curriculum, or by organizing some program, retreat, or sports tournament. These things are the icing on the cake, but they are not the cake itself.

Our Archdiocese and our parish communities are not mere organizations or institutions but living temples where mankind is inducted into the powerful presence of God, in which we encounter the same Holy Spirit that descended as tongues of fire upon the disciples at Pentecost. Therefore, they must be places where souls find salvation and hearts are set aflame with love for God and neighbor. By God’s grace, they should raise people up “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” leading them to be “partakers of the divine nature” (Ephesians 4:13; 2 Peter 1:4). They should inspire those thus brought into contact with the Living God to pour out the living water of the Spirit for the benefit of others, through loving and selfless service. They should embrace the ascetical practices of the Church—fasting, prayers, and almsgiving—which foster repentance and healing in our hearts, by softening them and making them more receptive to God’s transformative grace.

This is the ideal to which we are called, but is all of this actually experienced in our Archdiocese, our parishes, and our homes? In a spirit of repentance, we must ask some difficult questions: How often do our parents prioritize their children’s sports and other activities over bringing them face-to-face with the Living God? How often do our parents pray with their children at home and speak with them about Christ and the saints? In our own lives, do we model fasting and charity or self-indulgence and greed, as an example for our children to follow? Do we encourage moral living as a God-given and life-giving means of sanctification, or do we just demand adherence to cultural prohibitions or, worse yet, ignore morality altogether? At the most basic level, do parents, godparents, aunts, and uncles take responsibility—throughout the week—for passing down the Faith to the children entrusted to them by God, or do they leave this job entirely to the priests, Sunday School teachers, and youth workers, who only see them for a couple hours a week?

Our parishes must also do some soul searching: Does our parish life show our children the importance of sanctity or the importance of paying the bills? Are our parishes focused on passing down “the Faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) or on preserving some ethnic identity? Do our people yearn for sermons that challenge them to repentance or just feel-good messages that affirm them in their complacency? Do we prioritize ministries that reach out to the community or social events for our members?

These are difficult questions, but we need to answer them honestly. Their purpose is not to point fingers at anyone but to drive home an important point: our young people learn more from what we do than from what we say. There is an unwritten curriculum we teach them

every moment of every day. Regardless of how much we talk about the rich theology of the Church, if we do not live as though we really believe in it, we cannot expect them to do so either.

As Metropolitan of this God-protected Archdiocese, I am committed to devote the resources necessary for youth and young-adult ministries that are second-to-none, but none of that will matter unless we all model what we are teaching. We must all rise to this challenge—hierarchs, clergy, and laity. Although the problem may seem daunting, we do not face it alone. God is with us, and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). This, more than any faddish program or strategic plan, will be the source of our success.

To Our Young People

To our young people, I want to say that we love you dearly. From my meetings with many of you, I know how much you struggle to keep the Faith. I know that you are often lonely and anxious. You have many demands on your time and feel burdened by responsibilities. I know that many of you are grieving the loss of loved ones, as a result of this pandemic. I know that many of you missed out on major life moments (such as proms, graduations, sports, and extracurricular activities) and were left for months to learn and socialize via a computer monitor. The time in which I grew up was simpler, and I admire your resilience during these difficult days. Let me also say that my heart breaks when I think about how we, as the elder generation—both clergy and laity—have at times let you down, failed to live up to what we preach, or not supported you enough in your struggles.

I do ask you, nonetheless, to be in dialogue with us, your elders. Yes, we are imperfect, but we are struggling just like you to grow into the people God created us to be. We may be older than you, but we are your fellow pilgrims on the road to God's Kingdom. This road is both joyous and (if I may be honest) difficult, so let us all cultivate a spirit of mutual forgiveness and support along the way. As part of this dialogue, remember that even though we may not be as adept with the latest technology or as adaptable to change as you are, we do have some timeless wisdom to share with you—the fruit of experience, that most effective teacher. However much the world seems to change, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), and our path to sanctification as human persons is ever the same.

Each year, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we proclaim that this Orthodox Faith has established the universe. It cannot be undermined by the wondrous technologies and bizarre social innovations of our day. Indeed, this Faith has faced challenges in every age—those vanities and temptations that have tried to pull us away from Christ—yet every generation of faithful Christians has overcome those challenges by staying close to Christ, who has shown us that the path of suffering and self-denial leads to eternal life. The Lord told His disciples: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Joy and peace are not found by capitulating to the pressures around us but by overcoming them hand-in-hand with Christ. Let us all join together in taking up our crosses and following Him.

I have seen news articles proclaiming that your generation will create another “Roaring Twenties” after the pandemic has passed. The authors meant to say that, after pandemic-related restrictions on socializing are lifted, there will be an explosion of immoral behavior. My prayer is that you will yearn not for vain parties but for true communion with Christ and with the family of believers. My dear ones in Christ, let this be a decade where the roaring from your generation is the booming proclamation of the Risen Christ!

Let Us Rise to This Challenge

Beloved faithful in Christ, there is no letter I can write that will adequately sum up all we need to do at this critical time. My purpose here is to begin a process of introspection and openness, of repentance and reconciliation. In our world, young people feel alienated and lonely, scrolling through social media accounts in their bedrooms and wishing for the fulfilling lives they imagine others enjoy; and in nursing homes, the elderly also feel alienated and lonely, surfing through television channels and wondering why their grandchildren do

not call or visit. What a tragedy! We need each other, and we must reach out to one another. Certainly, in the Body of Christ, this sense of alienation must not be allowed to persist!

The Lord taught us: "Unless you are converted and become like little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3). He did not speak this just to the young people but *to all of us*. Let us all take time to consider what it means to be children of God. I have set this as the theme of next year's Creative Arts Festivals for this very reason, so that we can be reminded of the need for childlike faith. Let us all, therefore, with youthful innocence and enthusiasm, learn, worship, and serve together as children of God, growing up together "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Let us answer this fire bell we hear ringing in the night. I commit to doing my part, but in order to meet this challenge, we need each and every clergyman, parish-council member, parent, teacher, young adult, teen, and child to devote themselves to seeking Christ and living as He has taught us, with real and active love for God and their neighbors. Let us bridge these divides of alienation in our own homes and in our parishes, that we may truly be the Body of Christ, bringing His healing grace to this broken world.

With fervent prayers and great love for you all, I remain,


Your Father in Christ,



+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

September 17, 2021



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"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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GOD'S GIFT OF THE SENSES

(ESPECIALLY HEARING), AND OF MUSIC

Daniel Powell

My parents gave me a valuable lesson, albeit implicitly: “Never miss an opportunity to keep your mouth closed and your ears open.” Various saints (including St. Theophan the Recluse) have spoken of the role of the senses, like that of hearing, in spiritual illness and health.

Our nature is equipped with five physical senses, principally associated with five organs. Four of these organs have something in common and distinguish them from the fifth: our eyes for sight, our nose for smell and breath, our flesh for touch, our ears for hearing, and, the most distinct, our mouth for different senses and actions (tasting, breathing, eating, speaking). All senses seem to have a type of capacity and filter, but perhaps the mouth the least of all. The senses inform the intellect, but they ought not to govern it. They

should help enlighten the human soul, and not extinguish, or crush it, nor distract it from Him who created them for our use. They are, as St. Gregory of Nyssa says in *The Hexaemeron*, to inform us. The first four senses and organs are informative, as gates to the soul. The fifth is far less so, as it is less simple, and thus most challenged in operating in simple likeness to God.

The eye is both a portal and window to the soul (Matthew 6:22). It may behold the beauty of the Lord (Mary Magdalene in the garden, John 20:18) and the Creator's works (Thanksgiving Akathist). As a passive, but directed “consumer,” it is never sated, though it may grow clouded and harbor darkness. It is meant to absorb light into the soul as vision grows in clarity. By sight we are drawn toward what is needful. By it we walk in the light and see where there is darkness, so we may not stumble. (“But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him,” John 11:10; and

"But the path of the just is as a shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is darkness; they know not at what they stumble," Proverbs 4:18–19.) The visible heavens and earth guide us on the path of knowledge of God. ("The heavens declare the glory of God...," Psalm 19; see also Isaiah 60:4, Matthew 6:22–24, 1 Corinthians 12:2, John 9:1–41, Luke 18:35–43, and Mark 8:17–25.)

Through the nose we smell things (and through it, of course, we breathe). Those odors can become deeply embedded in our memory, and be strongly associated with our experiences at that time. When we smell the same odors again, those deep memories can be awakened powerfully. The sense of smell is perhaps the most pleasing of the senses, in its ability to unite the other senses and memory in prayerful anamnesis. One thinks of the "smells and bells" of liturgical prayer, as a sweet aroma and a fragrant offering. Smell is thus connected to the offering of prayers to the Lord, and to our offering of ourselves to be kindled by Him. (See 2 Corinthians 2:14–15, Leviticus 1:1, and Ephesians 5:2.)

The skin, the largest organ of the body, covers the body, and thus protects it without taking anything in (usually). The nerves in the skin permit finer gradations of sensation than simply "feeling." The skin is associated with the "the flesh," which is often cited as the most difficult to submit to *theosis*. The passions find strong couplings through the flesh, which is the body and the sensory organs in opposition to the Spirit of God (Romans 7:5, 18, 25; 8:1–5; see also, Genesis 1:27, 2:7, 3:21, Ezekiel 37, John 1:14, Matthew 26:40–43).

It is through nerve endings in the skin that we feel pressure, heat, cold, and pain. It is the sensory organ with the shortest range, and this, too, may be instructive. We instinctively seek to restore a lost unity with another by *proximity*, a warm embrace of another or the offer of an embrace. Words are not essential at such times: touch is enough. (See 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Genesis 2:24 and 2 Samuel 6:7, the latter showing one unprepared for the contact, in contrast to Matthew 9:20–22, in which one was prepared.)

The mouth is the organ of taste – "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Through taste, we often identify what is healthy to eat and what is toxic. The mouth is also an alternative conduit for breath, but it is more noisy when it does!

As with the nose, the mouth allows the exchange of what is useful for life from the air, to expel that which is not. The mouth also consumes in a much different manner than eye, nose, ear or skin takes in anything. It has less benefit to the individual's soul, though it may deeply help or harm others by its action. ("What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man," Matthew 15:18; "Out of the mouth of babes Thou has perfected praise," Matthew 21:16). Those unaffected by disturbance, distortion, or perturbation of the other senses and organs are able to use the mouth as designed. The mouth has redemptive qualities if it is used in a way that benefits the hearer, as exemplified by the *Logos*. Our words do not subsist, but they do have effects. (See James 3:5, 3:8; Proverbs 18:21; 1 Peter 3:10; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 59:17; Isaiah 24:14; and Psalm 141:3ff.: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth and protecting door round about my lips"; "Let our mouths be filled with your praise, O Lord, and the righteous shall hear it and be glad.")

Finally, we come to the ear and the role of music. Our faculty of hearing, too, is ever active, discerning order from noise, as we naturally flee discord and seek harmony and order. Putting edifying words to music deepens their physical and spiritual resonance, for constant reminder and recall, as it moves the body and soul in ascent and participation, and for these we are made. Music may certainly be felt through the body, but the primary conduit is the ear, and hearing that is finely tuned to perceive frequencies and patterns. It routinely perceives from near and afar, much more than the other senses, as it can hear what is not yet seen or is invisible. The ear is ever inundated with vibrations, from nature and people. Noise is that which is offensive to the hearing, as such sounds are typically unnatural or are warnings. The peaceful mind learns discernment for tuning the ear and soul away from *logismoi*. Of the many sounds we hear, music resonates throughout the body, motivating us to move by the influence of the soul (David danced before the Lord; 2 Samuel 6:14–22). For with pleasant sounds, music, and words, the soul warms and the heart is glad. Thus, the words of the Psalms are most powerful, as is evident even in David's and Saul's interaction. (David's playing of music for Saul quietened the *logismoi*; 1 Samuel 16:14–23).

The energy of music delivered to the ear is unlike

that received through the other organs, as the energy communicates throughout the body and couples with human energy, individually and corporately in the *ecclesia*. By the ear, we are able to receive the comforting voice and words of others, and these too dive deeply into the heart and soul for eternal deposit. Thus we are encouraged to use music and words for the healing of spirit and soul (“... speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks at all times for all things unto God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Ephesians 5:19–20). Harmful sounds and words, too, have powerful effects, most difficult to undo later. “The poor man cried and the Lord heard him.” (Psalm 34:6)

We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). We are far more than an assembly of organs and senses. The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both (Proverbs 20:12). Neither eye has seen nor ear heard nor has entered into the mind of man the things God has prepared for those that love Him. Each of the senses and

organs given us has a role in collaborating with the Spirit of life breathed into us, and for participation in the divine Life.

The senses ought to aid in our deification, but not rule it. In addition, we are more than an assembly of sensory organs and neural pathways; we are persons made to live as designed, to be in the image and likeness to God, insofar as we participate in *theosis*. Let us not lean on our own understanding, but on Him who is the Giver of Life. May He come and abide in us and cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls. Let us, with all we are, seek Him in the time in which He may be found, for the days are short and the Bridegroom cometh! (Matthew 25:6). (See Isaiah 40:1–10, Ecclesiastes 12, Luke 12:20.)

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15).

All these things you know, but perhaps you will find consolation that even the least of all may come to some improved awareness and glorify God.

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ST. OLYMPIA, ABBESS AND DEACONESS

Fr. Dan Daly



One of the most recognizable sites in the world is St. Peter's Square

ed by Constantine in 324, Constantinople was still a young city. The century of St. Olympia's birth is



in Rome. Reaching out from the great basilica are the Colonnades of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Atop the Colonnades are the statues of 140 saints — one of which is that of an Orthodox woman who played a very important place in the life of St. John Chrysostom. This is the statue of St. Olympia, abbess and deaconess of Constantinople. During his years as Archbishop of Constantinople, no one was closer to St. John. After his banishment from the city, St. Olympia was the recipient of seventeen letters written from the years of his exile. In the long history of Byzantium, few women have occupied the social and ecclesiastical position of the Deaconess, St. Olympia.¹ In many ways her life was one of extremes, from wealth and privilege to suffering and despondency.

THE EARLY YEARS OF ST. OLYMPIA

She was born about 362, very likely during the rule of Julian the Apostate (361–363). Constantinople is usually given as the place of her birth. Found-

without parallel in the history of the Church. It began with the final Roman persecutions of Diocletian, which were ended by Emperor Constantine. The heresies of Arianism and Appollinarianism plagued the Church. The first two Ecumenical Councils, those of I Nicaea in 325 and I Constantinople in 381, were held in that century.

No century produced so many great theologians: St. Athanasius, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyril of Alexandria; and in the West, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and St. Jerome. It saw the arrival of St. John Chrysostom in Constantinople as its Archbishop in 398. The life of St. Olympia's was linked in various ways to the most important theologians of the century, and to St. John Chrysostom in particular.

St. Olympia's family was extremely wealthy. Her grandfather, Ablabius of Crete, rising from a humble background, became a close associate of Emperor Constantine. This association led to the amassing of very great wealth with estates in Asia Minor and

in the City of Constantinople. Ablabius rose to the position of Senator and Count of the Empire. He was appointed the tutor of Constantius II, the Emperor's son. Unfortunately, because of his support of St. Athanasius in the fight against Arianism, he was put to death by his student. St. Olympia was the daughter of his son Seleucus and his wife Alexandra. Because of the early death of her parents, she became the heiress of the vast family properties. Her family had risen to prominence in Constantinople. Her aunt had been engaged to Constantine, the son of Constantine, before his death.

Orphaned at an early age, St. Olympia was raised under the guardianship of her uncle Procopius, prefect of Constantinople. Her education was directed by Theodora,² a first cousin of St. Gregory the Theologian and friend of St. Basil the Great. Her pious guardians opened the doors for St. Olympia to many church leaders, including St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Although he could not attend St. Olympia's wedding, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote a poem for her on the occasion.

At her request St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote and dedicated his Commentary on The Song of Songs to her. She was also a benefactress of St. Peter of Sebaste, the brother of St. Basil the Great, as well as many other bishops.

Given her great wealth, her connections to the imperial family and her connections to the greatest theologians of the era, St. Olympia could be said to have been in a most enviable position, especially for a very young woman. She occupied a very important position in the life of Constantinople.

HER MARRIAGE

In c. 384/5, Olympia married Nebridius, the Prefect of Constantinople. Considering his high office Nebridius, was very possibly an older man, perhaps with a previous marriage.³ Nebridius died after only twenty months of marriage.⁴

The "Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom," written by Palladius,⁵ has its setting in Rome. An unnamed bishop defends St. John Chrysostom in a dialogue with the Deacon Theodore. Among the many topics, the dialogue speaks of the relationship between St. Olympia and St. John. It is believed that the bishop in the dialogue actually was Palladius himself, who when asked if he knew St. Olympia said that he "knew her well."

The widowed Olympia was a young, highly educated and extremely wealthy woman. St. John Chrysostom speaks of "the greatness of her intelligence."⁶

Her anonymous biographer tells of the events that followed the death of her husband:

(Olympia) was falsely accused before the emperor Theodosius of having dispensed her goods in a disorderly fashion. Since indeed she was his relation, he took pains to unite her in marriage with a certain Elpidius, a Spaniard, one of his own relatives. He directed many persistent entreaties to her and when he failed to achieve his goal, he was annoyed. The pious Olympia, however, explained her position to the emperor Theodosius: "If my king, the Lord Jesus Christ, wanted me to be joined with a man, he would not have taken away my first husband immediately. Since he knew that I was unsuited for the conjugal life and was not able to please a man, he freed him, Nebridius, from the bond and delivered me of this very burdensome yoke and servitude to a husband, having placed upon my mind the happy yoke of continence."⁷

Her refusal led to the control of her properties by Emperor Theodosius. Her response to the emperor revealed how important her vast riches were to her.

You have shown toward my humble person. O sovereign master, a goodness befitting a king and suited to a bishop, when you commanded my very heavy burden to be put under careful guard, for the administration of it caused me anxiety. But you will do even better if your order that it be distributed to the poor and to the churches, for I prayed much to avoid the vainglory arising from the apportionment, lest I neglect true riches for those perhaps pertaining to material things.⁸

Her biographer then tells of the outcome of St. Olympia's challenge: "The emperor, upon his return from the battle against Maximus, gave the order that she could exercise control over her own possessions, since he had heard of the intensity of her ascetic discipline. But she distributed all of her unlimited and immense wealth and assisted everyone, simply and without distinction."⁹

No place, no country, no desert, no island, no distant setting, remained without share in

the benevolence of this famous woman; rather, she furnished the churches with liturgical offerings and helped the monasteries and convents, the beggars, the prisoners, and those in exile; quite simply, she distributed her wealth over the entire world. And the blessed Olympias herself burst the supreme limit in her almsgiving and her humility, so that nothing can be found greater than what she did.¹⁰

ARCHBISHOP NECTARIUS AND DEACONESS OLYMPIA

After the resignation and departure of Gregory the Theologian as Archbishop of Constantinople in 381, a pious catechumen, Nectarius, was chosen by the Emperor as Archbishop. He served until his death in 397, at which point St. John Chrysostom was named Archbishop. St. Olympia was very supportive of Nectarius. Her biographer states that she “sustained” him. “The courtly old man so valued her charitable generosity, and found her advice on church affairs so helpful, that he ordained her a deaconess when she was still in her early thirties.”¹¹

During these years, “there was rekindled in her the divine love and she took up refuge in the haven of salvation, the great, catholic, and apostolic church of this royal city.”¹² She soon established her monastery near the Hagia Sophia Cathedral. “And by the divine will she was ordained deaconess of this holy cathedral of God and she built a monastery at an angle south of it She constructed a path from the monastery to the narthex of the holy church, and in the first quarter she enclosed her own chambermaids, numbering fifty, all who lived in purity and virginity.”¹³ Her monastery eventually grew to 250 women, some from senatorial families.

ARRIVAL OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Nectarius died on September 27, 397. Having been chosen by Emperor Theodosius, St. John Chrysostom arrived in Constantinople in the year 398. Born in Antioch, he was educated by the noted pagan philosopher Libanius and the Christian theologian Diodore of Tarsus. Against the will of his widowed mother, he became a monk in the hills near Antioch in 375. His asceticism resulted in serious injury to his health. Returning to Antioch, he was ordained deacon in 381, and priest in 386, and became the great preacher of the Church of Antioch from 386 until his appointment as Archbishop

of Constantinople in 397.

His residence was adjacent to the Cathedral. Some years earlier St. Olympia had built her monastery also next to the Cathedral. Only a wall separated the bishop's residence from her monastery. St. John became the spiritual father to St. Olympia and her community. The monastery provided food for the Archbishop, who chose to eat alone. Regarding the monastery, “no one from the outside, neither man or woman, was permitted to come upon them, the only exception being the most holy patriarch John, who visited continually and sustained them by his divinely inspired teachings.”¹⁴

St. John and St. Olympia lived at a time when monasticism was in full bloom. St. Basil the Great had written two “rules” setting out guidelines for the ascetic life. Both St. John and St. Olympia were serious intellectual Christians who were committed to the ascetic life. History brought them together in a most fortuitous way.

J. N. D. Kelly describes the relationship between the two saints:

As the leading deaconess attached to his cathedral, John must have made the acquaintance of Olympias almost immediately after his arrival in the capital. From the start there seems to have developed between them a deep and, as events were to show, lasting friendship founded on an affinity which was both spiritual and intellectual.... Both practiced similar austerities. Like him she had ruined her digestive system with excessive fasting and an injudicious diet.... Olympias made herself responsible for taking care of his clothes and his simple meals, which she sent across each day to the *episkopeion*. There was no one in Constantinople with whom he was to have a deeper or more sympathetic understanding, no one with whom he was to feel more at ease or to whom he was to pour out his heart more unreservedly than this independent, strong-willed but intensely emotional woman.”¹⁵

His years as Archbishop of Constantinople were turbulent. His appointment had been opposed by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria, who had been forced to consecrate him. Theophilus saw the rising power and influence of the Church of Constantinople as a challenge to Alexandria. St. John refused to hold lavish banquets for the influential laity and

1. Among the most important sources for her life are "The Life of St. Olympia," written shortly after her death by an unknown person who knew her; "The Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom," by Palladius of Helenopolis; "The Seventeen Letters," written by St. John Chrysostom to St. Olympia during the years of his exile; "The Lausiaca History," by Palladius, and "The Church History" of Sozoman.
2. Upon the arrival of St. Gregory the Theologian in Constantinople, Theodora gave him her home, which became the church of the *Anastasia*, where St. Gregory preached his famous sermons against the Arians.
3. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends, Essays and Translations*, Studies in Women and Religion, Vol. 2 (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1979), p. 110.
4. Her anonymous biographer, as well as Palladius, are of the opinion that she and Nebridius did not live as husband and wife. Cf. "The Life of St. Olympia" by an unknown author, in Clark, op. cit., p. 128. St. John, who knew her better than anyone, does bring this matter up.
5. Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom*, translated and edited by Robert T. Meyer, (New York: Newman Press), 1985.
6. St. John Chrysostom, Letter 8 in *Letters to Saint Olympia*, translated with an introduction by David C. Ford, (Yonkers, NY:

clergy. He set out to reform the bishops and priests. He challenged the greed of the laity. His reform efforts made him unpopular.

The patristic scholar Johannes Quasten describes the growing hostility toward St. John: "Though he himself gave an example of simplicity and devoted his large income to the erection of hospitals and the support of the poor, his zealous efforts to raise the moral tone of priests and people encountered strong opposition. This grew into hatred when in 401, at a synod of Ephesus, he had six bishops guilty of simony deposed."¹⁶ Quasten further notes that St. John's "fiery temperament betrayed him only too often into inconsiderate, if not offensive, speech and action. His plan for reform of clergy and laity was unrealistic and his uncompromising adherence to his ideal resulted in uniting all hostile forces against him."¹⁷

Among his most powerful adversaries was Aelia Eudoxia, wife of emperor Arcadius, who assumed that John's denunciations of extravagance in feminine dress were aimed at herself.

John's condemnation by the Synod of the Oak¹⁸ came about after he had accepted a number of monks from Egypt who had been expelled from Alexandria by Patriarch Theophilus, John's adversary. Theophilus had been called to Constantinople to apologize to St. John for his remarks against him. He was to appear before a synod overseen by St. John. Theophilus arrived with a shipload of bishops and turned the tables by summoning St. John to a synod made up of predominantly Egyptian bishops. St. John was accused to a list of outrageous offenses including treason. This resulted in him being deposed and exiled. This first exile, however, was very short-lived.

St. John was recalled by the Emperor, not only because of tumult among his followers, but of an event in the palace that frightened the Empress. It may have been earthquake or possibly a miscarriage. She insisted that he be called back. The recall, however, was very brief. Empress Eudoxia had a silver statue of herself installed near the cathedral. St. John's reaction resulted in his second banishment. He is reported to have said, "Again Herodias raves; again, she is troubled; she dances again; and again desires to receive John's head in a charger." Those words sealed his fate.

The Emperor ordered Chrysostom to cease performing ecclesiastical functions, which he refused to do. Thereupon he was forbidden the use of any

church. When he and his loyal priests on the Easter vigil 404 gathered to confer solemn baptism, the ceremonies were interrupted by armed intervention, the faithful were driven from the place and the baptismal water stained with blood.¹⁹ Five days after Pentecost St. John was ordered to leave the city at once.²⁰

After meeting with the bishops faithful to him, "he went into the baptistry and called Olympia, who never departed from the church along with the deaconesses Pentadia, and Procla, and Silvina, the wife of the blessed Nebridius...." "Come my daughters, listen to me, I see that the things concerning me have come to an end. I have finished my course, and perhaps you shall see my face no more."²¹ The women wept. This was the last time that he and St. Olympia saw each other.

His banishment sparked riots among his supporters in the capital. Palladius describes what followed. "After this unutterable and inexplicable darkness there appeared a flame in the middle of the throne where John used to sit." The cathedral was destroyed by fire.

In the days following the departure of St. John, his followers refused to hold communion with the newly appointed Archbishop Arsacius. They formed worshiping communities outside the city. They were persecuted and imprisoned. After weeks of investigation, the officials of the city concluded that they could not discover who was responsible for burning the cathedral. The bishops and priests faithful to St. John were forced to leave the city. St. Olympia was called twice before the investigating tribunal. She was accused of starting the fire. She responded, "My past life ought to avert all suspicion from me, for I have devoted my large property to the restoration of the temples of God." What troubled the government most was that she absolutely would not recognize the new Archbishop.

Her adversaries "wished to put a stop to the constant activity in which she was engaged on behalf of the holy John's recall and they sent her to as well into exile in Nicomedia, the capital city of the province of Bythinia."²²

THE EXILE

St. John left Constantinople in 403. He was exiled to Cucusus in Lesser Armenia for three years. John wrote letters which still held great influence in Constantinople. As a result of this, he was further exiled from Cucusus. His enemies wanted to

see his life cut short. He was banished to Pityus on the eastern end of the Black Sea, but died on September 14, 407, at Comama in Pontus.

Among the many letters written by St. John during his exile, 17 were written to St. Olympia. These letters are an important source of information about the trials of St. John during those three years.²³ St. John endured the suffering of traveling over four hundred miles. He had incurred illnesses, living through winter weather, the abuse of his captors, and the marauding raids of the Isaurians. He also had to endure the sufferings brought on by the hostility of bishops and monks. He was driven to an early death. He was only 58 when he died.

The Letters of St. John addressed the suffering of St. Olympia after their separation. The constant theme of his letters was the suffering that plagued his spiritual daughter, namely “despondency” (*athymia*). The conditions of the church in Constantinople and the treatment of St. John were the source of her suffering. Almost all of the seventeen letters refer to her despondency, which can be described as depression accompanied by hopelessness.

St. John is very much aware of the misery associated with despondency.

Despondency is for souls a grievous torture chamber, unspeakably painful, more fierce and bitter than every ferocity and torment. It imitates the poisonous worm that attacks not only the body but also the soul, and not only the bones but also the mind. It is a continual executioner who not only tears in pieces one's torso but also mutilates the strength of one's soul. It is a continuous night, darkness with no light, a tempest, a gale, an unseen fever burning more powerfully than any flames, a war having no relief, a disease which casts a shadow over nearly everything visible. For even the sun and the air seem to be oppressive to those who are suffering from these things and midday seems to be as darkest night.²⁴

St. Olympia was now separated from her friend and spiritual father. The church of Constantinople was afflicted by violence and division. She was overcome by “clouds of darkness.” She was in a state of despondency. When she told St. John that she did not have the strength to overcome her state of mind, he told her that this is an excuse.

Throughout his letters to her St. John reminds her

that she retains her human freedom. Despondency in and of itself is something evil. She must struggle to overcome it. She must face her evil thoughts and fight against them. He is convinced that the source of her suffering is her thoughts. She must replace the negative thoughts with positive ones.²⁵ She has the power to embrace positive thoughts. “I know the strength of your soul is filled with piety, I know the greatness of your intelligence and the power of your Christian way of thinking which alone is sufficient to command the madness of your despair to be cast into the sea, making everything calm.”²⁶ He reminds her of her patience in the face of suffering, and her extraordinary asceticism.

In his efforts to help St. Olympia, St. John does something that would be of value to any person suffering from depression. He takes her beyond the confinement of her own thoughts. He puts the whole tragedy into a far greater context; that of the spiritual realm. She must see her sufferings in that context. His letters are a trip through the Bible, in which he brings to mind the many biblical persons who suffered and who overcame them. They were great because of the nobility of their sufferings. She must accept her suffering with the patience of Job, even to the point of thanking God for her sufferings which will have their rewards from God.

CONCLUSION

Whoever chose St. Olympia as one of the saints adorning Bernini's colonnade chose well. Although we do not have any of her writings, the testimony of St. John alone is sufficient evidence of her holiness. Like her spiritual father, she took ascetical practice to an extreme. The joys and sorrows that accompany every life, was in her case lived again in the extreme. She was very, very wealthy, yet she gave it all away. While most Christians are happy to find a good spiritual father, St. Olympia enjoyed the friendship of some of the greatest theologians of the church, ultimately finding a great saint as her spiritual father. She was certainly a person of great courage, not intimidated by an emperor or bishop. Both Nectarius and St. John found in her a valuable friend and consultant. Her personal example of holiness drew 250 women to her monastery. She remains a most fascinating saint of whom we would like to know much more. St. John died on September 14, 407. St. Olympia died ten months later on July 25, 408.

Fr. Dan Daly

St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2016), p. 58. This excellent work is the only English translation of all 17 of St. John's letters to St. Olympia.

7. Clark, op. cit., p. 129.

8. Ibid., p. 130.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 137.

11. J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), p. 113.

12. Clark, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 133.

15. Kelly, op. cit., p. 113.

16. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. III (Westminster, MD.: Christian Classics, 1992), p. 426.

17. Ibid., p. 425.

18. Kelly, op. cit., p. 139.

19. Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 6, 18, 14.

20. Quasten, op. cit., p. 427.

21. Palladius, pp. 66–67.

22. Clark, op. cit., p. 134.

23. Cf. Ford, op. cit.

24. Letter 10.2.

25. The importance of positive thoughts was embraced by the spiritual writers who followed St. John, as well as the clinical approach of modern cognitive therapy. Cf. Ford, op. cit., p. 22, footnote 28.

26. Ford, Op. cit., p. 58.

THANK YOU, FR. GREGORY OFIESH

Ron Nicola



I thank God for the life and ministry of Fr. Gregory Ofiesh, and for his work enriching the lives of so many Orthodox Christians and others. As one of those fortunate people, sharing thoughts about the impact of that ministry is both humbling and a blessed gift.

The Very Reverend Father Gregory Ofiesh entered eternal life on August 11, 2021. His passing came two days shy of his ninetieth birthday. Receiving the news immediately released a flood of memories about this beloved priest, husband, father, grandfather, and leader.

I was a fifteen-year-old altar boy at St. Nicholas Church in San Francisco when Fr. Gregory preached his first sermon to his new parish on Mother's Day, 1964. Amazingly, vivid memories of that Sunday have stayed with me ever since. He spoke about his mother, Khouria Emily Ofiesh, being a model of motherhood as he told the story of another mother whose love for her son was unyielding despite the son's tragic shortcomings toward everyone, including her. His ability to preach powerful and captivating sermons week after week became one of the many gifts that would help the parish grow and thrive during his thirty-seven years as pastor.

By virtue of Fr. Gregory's vision, the parish hosted the 1966 and 1976 Archdiocese Conventions. Those efforts opened the eyes of the parishioners to the reality that they were part of a larger Orthodox Christian community. His accomplishments were many: hosting numerous Parish Life Conferences; launching a summer camping program; helping establish new mission parishes throughout Northern California; reaching out to each new wave of immigrants who found their way to the San Francisco Bay Area; founding a daycare center; establishing group homes for troubled youth, and a primary grades elementary school; twice expanding the existing church building complex; and staging annual festivals celebrating Orthodoxy and Middle Eastern culture, all while maintaining the traditional staples of parish life: choir, Sunday school, and an array of parish organizations. Fr. Gregory's vision transformed the path forward for the St. Nicholas Parish and changed the lives of legions of individuals, within the Orthodox community and beyond. He was a doer and his vision and work established a culture of innovation that survives to this day.

Fr. Gregory, just as you worked tirelessly in service to two parishes, St. Elijah in Oklahoma City (1959–1964) and St. Nicholas in San Francisco (1964–2021) as pastor and pastor emeritus, you were there for me at critical moments when your guidance helped me discover a productive outcome. In recognizing and appreciating how my association with you changed my life for the better, I know for sure there are countless others who can tell a similar story.

Fr. Gregory's path to the priesthood was shaped by three important factors. First, he came from a family of priests. His father, grandfather and uncle were priests. His parents, Archpriest Nicholas and Khouria Emily Ofiesh, served the parish of St. George in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, for fifty years. Second, Fr. Gregory attended college for over ten years, earning degrees in fields that would

serve him well as a priest; philosophy, business, accounting, Latin, Greek, theology, religious education, psychology, pastoral psychology, child development, history, and political science. Third, being one of thirteen children shaped Fr. Gregory's unmistakable personality. Anyone who spent time in the company of the Ofiesh Family would marvel at the common personality traits among the children: intelligence, strength of will, depth of character, and passion for helping others ran in the family.

Fr. Gregory's ministry was bolstered by the experiences of his childhood and by the love and support of Khouria Mary Jane and their children, Nicholas, Nicole, Raymond, Michael, and granddaughter Mary Jane. Nicole, in speaking about her father said, "I am still not sure if who we saw was a good priest or just a good man. But we like to think you are just a really good Dad and a great *Giddo*, and we are proud, and I guess the saying is right because I can tell you we never listened to what you said, but we really did learn from what we saw."

I asked Fr. Paul O'Callaghan to offer some reflections from his perspective as a priest. He wrote

I have been a priest of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese for 42 years. I look back wistfully on the generation of priests who were my mentors back in the 1970s and 80s, almost all of whom are now gone. In particular, Fr. Paul Romley, with whom I served as assistant at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles, was very influential for me. But none had a greater impact on me than Fr. Gregory Ofiesh.

I was a long-haired college student from Marin County when I started attending Liturgy at St. Nicholas Church in San Francisco. I was deeply impressed by Fr. Gregory's powerful homilies and by the intensity with which he served the Liturgy. One could readily observe that he threw his entire heart and soul into it every time he served.

Beginning to feel the desire to serve Christ burn in my own heart, I approached Fr. Gregory and inquired whether it was even realistic for me to consider serving as an Orthodox priest. He said to me, "You know, I like you. I'm going to speak to Metropolitan PHILIP on your behalf." It wasn't long after that that I found myself heading to the East Coast to attend

seminary on a scholarship – and this was a kid that had never been east of Reno, Nevada!

During the last summer I spent at home before going to seminary, I stayed at the former parish house at St. Nicholas Church, desiring to accompany Fr. Gregory and observe his life as a priest. I saw amazing things. His day would begin about 7:00 a.m. and end about 11:00 p.m. It was non-stop activity all the time. No one could comfort the grieving, encourage the fainthearted, or give hope to the sick and the infirm the way he did. He went to court to testify on behalf of immigrant parishioners in tight situations. He was known everywhere he went in the city and no one could say *No* to him. His charisma was irresistible.

I also found myself doing odd things – like pulling weeds at one of his rental properties. I admit to wondering what that had to do with preparing for the priesthood. Of course, now I recognize that I was being taught humility and obedience in a very direct way. Whatever he asked me to do, I did without asking any questions. I kept my questions to myself and tried to learn whatever I could from him during that summer.

I owe my priesthood entirely to him and thus have vowed, with God's help, never to disappoint the trust he placed in me all those years ago. Yet I know one thing for certain; I will never be more than a pale shadow of the priest that Fr. Gregory Ofiesh was. May his memory be eternal!

Thank you, Fr. Gregory. The number of people who could tell stories and recount ways you led them through crises and milestones alike would be endless. With all of those people in mind, we say, "Fr. Gregory, God rest your soul, and may the Lord say, 'Well done thou good and faithful servant'" (Matthew 25:21).

Ron Nicola
Ron served as Chairman of the Stewardship Department and served his parish and Archdiocese in many leadership positions for over five decades.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS

DIAZ, David, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on September 5, 2021, at St. James Church, Modesto, California.

FINE, Nicholas, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on September 12, 2021. Dn. Nicholas is a seminarian at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

SCHLUETER, Deacon Seraphim (Jeffrey), to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on August 1, 2021, at St. Willibrord Mission, Holland, Michigan. He is assigned as the pastor there.

VEST, Ephraim (Cody), to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on August 22, 2021, at the Church of St. Mary, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Dn. Ephraim will be beginning his second year of theological training at St. Tikhon's Seminary.

ELEVATIONS

EID, Fr. Christopher, to the dignity of Archpriest by Bishop THOMAS on September 12, 2021, at Holy Ascension Church, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

PURDIE, Priest James, to the dignity of Archpriest by Bishop THOMAS on September 19, 2021, at the Church of St. Basil, Hampton, Virginia.

APPOINTMENTS

DAVIS, Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Jeremy, to be the Metropolitan's Hierarchical Assistant at our Archdiocesan Headquarters. Fr. Jeremy will assist the Metropolitan with archdiocesan administration and oversee the offices in Englewood, New Jersey. Fr. Jeremy is a son of St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas, and a graduate of St. Vladimir's Seminary. He served as a priest at St. Elijah Church, Oklahoma City, and at Holy Ascension Church, Norman, Oklahoma, for a total of fifteen years.

RETIRED

BARCKETT, Archpriest James, effective August 25, 2021.

On the morning of Thursday, September 9, 2021, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH visit-



Metropolitan JOSEPH Pays Fraternal Visit to Metropolitan HILARION of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

ed His Eminence Metropolitan HILARION, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), at his synodal residence in Manhattan. Greeting Metropolitan JOSEPH and his delegation of Fr. Jeremy Davis, Fr. Thomas Zain and Fr. Nicholas Belcher were His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS of Manhattan (ROCOR) and local clergy of the Russian Church Abroad.

The visit began with the veneration of the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God "of the Sign," the *Hodigitria* of the Russian diaspora. The metropolitans and clergy then venerated holy relics from the Russian Synodal Cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign that included St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, and St. Tikhon of Moscow, among others. Metropolitan HILARION then told Metropolitan JOSEPH of the history of the synodal residence.

In their fraternal meeting, the metropolitans and their clergy discussed inter-Orthodox Christian service, missionary work and youth ministry. The two metropolitans exchanged gifts in hopes they will host similar gatherings and concelebrate the divine services in the future to strengthen their churches and their bonds in Christ Jesus.

That evening, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH was an invited guest of His Eminence, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York. Cardinal Dolan celebrated a mass in honor of persecuted Christians in Africa at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan.

To begin the month of September, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH visited seven churches in



In six days, Metropolitan JOSEPH visits seven Northern California Churches

northern California. On Wednesday, September 1, Sayidna JOSEPH presided over Vespers at Holy Virgin Mary Church in West Sacramento, in which he tonsured brothers Nicholas and Nathaniel Baba as readers.

On Thursday, September 2, His Eminence joined the clergy and faithful of St. Gabriel Church in Angels Camp, where he presided over Vespers.

On Friday, September 3, Sayidna JOSEPH reviewed the construction of the new temple of St. Timothy Church in Fairfield, led a meeting of the Northern California Deanery, and presided over an Akathist to the Theotokos.



On Saturday, September 4, His Eminence joined the clergy and faithful of Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos Hills for morning prayers and brunch.

On Sunday morning, September 5, Sayidna JOSEPH presided over Orthros and celebrated the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at St. James Church in Modesto, in which he ordained Subdeacon David Diaz to the holy diaconate and tonsured David Quilici as a subdeacon. His Eminence blessed the new iconostasis and prayed over the children as they start a new Sunday School year.

That evening, Sayidna presided over Vespers at St. Athanasius the Great Church in Sacramento,





where he elevated the pastor, Fr. Stephen Howell, to the dignity of archpriest.

On Monday, September 6, His Eminence concluded his northern California visits with Vespers at All Saints Church in Santa Rosa.

CHARITIES CORNER

The Committee on Charitable Outreach has been busy over the past months, working to expand our outreach and to assist parishes and organizations in providing emergency funding during the COVID pandemic.

Food for Hungry People and Charitable Outreach

Over the past twelve months the Committee has provided more than \$70,000 to enable our churches to provide direct assistance to parishioners affected by the pandemic. In addition, Food for Hungry People and Charitable Outreach, under the very capable direction of Robin Lynn Nicholas, has provided \$16,000 in grant funding to charitable efforts and organizations associated with our Archdiocese to support outreach programs during these turbulent times.

Grant Funding and Emergency COVID Relief Funding Still Available

Churches are encouraged to visit the Archdiocese website under the Charitable Outreach link for the FFHP and Charitable Outreach Grant application. Also, funds are available to assist those parishioners in need of emergency COVID Relief. Priests need only to apply by e-mailing athomas@antiochian.org.

Children's Relief Fund

Since assuming the position of Administrator of the Children's Relief Fund (CRF), Deborah Brown has continued to vet and monitor our overseas contacts to assure that funds are transmitted securely and are directed to the appropriate recipients. To date, \$51,000 has been securely disbursed

to children in Palestine.

Please note: We understand that some of our CRF donors have expressed concern that money has not been disbursed to the sponsored children in Lebanon. We delayed disbursement until we could ascertain that transmission of funds would be safe and that monies would reach the designated children. As a result, no funds were disbursed to Lebanon during 2019 and 2020. That situation is now rectified. On June 23, 2021, the Children's Relief Fund made an initial disbursement of \$6,875 for 2019 and 2020 to our neediest children in Lebanon. We recently received confirmation that these funds were properly received by our sponsored children. CRF is in the process of disbursing the remainder of the 2019 and 2020 funding. Through *The Word* magazine's "Charities Corner," we will keep our donors apprised of progress in these matters.

Funding for Lebanon

We were grateful to work collaboratively with Mona Houcheime from California this past spring to distribute over \$10,000 among three Orthodox schools (Beirut Annunciation Orthodox College, Zahret El Ihsan Orthodox School and Ecole Des Trois Docteurs Orthodox School) that were damaged by the blast in Beirut last year. The money will be used for computer equipment.

The Charities Committee recently approved a grant to the Orthodox Youth Movement to support the Beirut Clinic, which offers psychological and medical support to victims of the 2020 blast and others in need.

Charitable Outreach Committee

Anne Bourjaily Thomas, Chair athomas@antiochian.org

Fr. Ted Pulcini

Robin Lynn Nicholas

Antiochian House of Studies Presents a New Mission Statement

The Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) brings the ethos of the historical "School of Antioch" of the Roum Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East to North America. Antioch has a missionary heritage with rich ethnic and linguistic diversity to all. AHOS provides a distinctly Antiochian Orthodox Christian education for clergy, laity, and others, by establishing an opportunity to experience the Orthodox way of life. The House of Studies creates a curriculum that provides for the teaching of Orthodox worship, doctrine,

action, and their interrelations for its participants through rigorous academic studies and spiritual direction. This is accomplished through a curriculum that can be lived through residential and hybrid learning opportunities in an intimate, home-like environment, from which the term “House” in our name comes. We are committed to being faithful to our Apostolic Tradition, preserved and expressed in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

In Hurricane Ida’s Wake, Metropolitan JOSEPH Brings Comfort, Resources to Louisiana Church

Peter Samore

The pastor and faithful of St. Basil the Great Church in Metairie, Louisiana could not believe all the blessings that His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH brought to them in less than 24 hours. The community is still recovering from Hurricane Ida. In light of this, Sayidna JOSEPH wanted to bring God’s comfort and mercy to the parish, as well as resources to help in recovery efforts.

No obstacle would stop him. Not a single hotel was available in a fifty-mile radius. So, early on the morning of Sunday, September 19, 2021, His Eminence left the Archdiocesan Headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey, boarded a



the community with a check for \$10,000 from the Archdiocese to assist in overall recovery efforts. He promised a second contribution from the donations their sister churches collected in Sayidna JOSEPH’s appeal. St. Basil Church was most grateful.

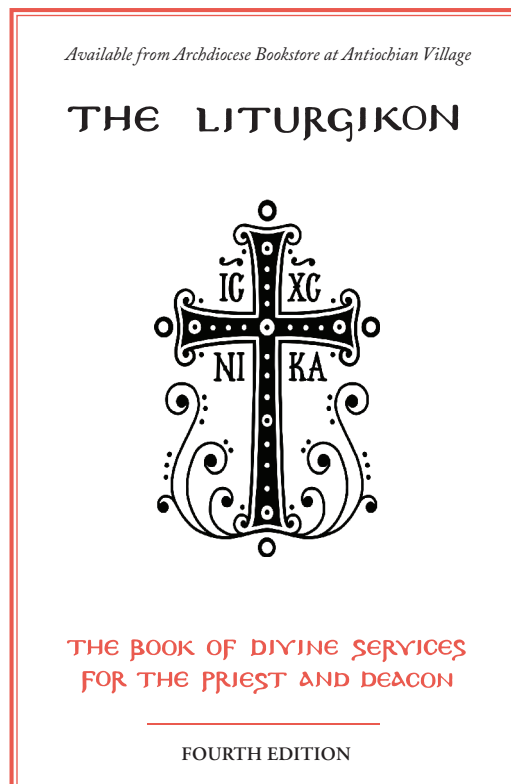
His Eminence praised Fr. Peter as a kind, committed, caring, and engaging pastor, recalling their first meeting five years before when Sayidna JOSEPH visited New Orleans for the Orthodox Young Professionals Conference. He called the parish council gracious and the choir beautiful – not in need of a single correction.

That afternoon, His Eminence boarded another airplane and arrived home at the Archdiocesan Headquarters late Sunday night.



plane and flew nonstop to New Orleans to celebrate the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St. Basil Church, where V. Rev. Peter Nugent and the entire community enthusiastically received him. The church itself suffered no damage from the hurricane earlier this month, but the church hall is in need of roof and other repairs. Sadly, four homes of parishioners were destroyed and most others suffered some sort of damage – all the more reason Sayidna JOSEPH wanted to be with them.

Following the liturgy, His Eminence presented



WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

Zacharias and Elizabeth found out in their old age that they were going to have a baby. Long after their so-called child-bearing years, after decades of disappointment and struggle, at a very advanced age, an angel appeared to Zacharias and told him he was going to be a *Daddy!* Can you imagine?

And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that

these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time" (Luke 1:18–20).

The story is told of a young novice who asked his Elder: "Master, why does God hide the number of our days? I mean, why is it that we cannot know when our end

will come?" The Elder replied, "My son, if man knew the number of his days, he would do nothing – he would achieve nothing – there would be no struggle, no art, no progress, no growth, only sorrow. He would spend what days he does have in dread of that one day, his last."

Think about it. If Zacharias and Elizabeth had known that they would have no children, but would spend most of their days in barrenness, only to have a child in their old age, would they still have married?

If Zacharias and Elizabeth had known that at the innocent age of eighteen months their only son would be hunted by murderers, would they still have prayed to have a child?

If Zacharias had foreseen that Elizabeth would have to flee with their only child to live in the desert, would he have gone through it all?

According to the tradition of the Church, Zacharias was notably silent on one other occasion. When Christ was born and Herod issued his infamous edict to slay all of the male children two years of age and under in Bethlehem and its surrounding areas, Elizabeth took John and fled into the wilderness. Zacharias stayed behind in the temple, and when Herod's soldiers questioned him about his son's whereabouts, he steadfastly remained silent, causing him to lose his life.

If Zacharias and Elizabeth had foreseen that Zacharias would be murdered in the Temple by those searching for his child, would they have done differently? Had Elizabeth and Zacharias known that their only son was to be beheaded at thirty years of age, thanks to the lustful thoughts of a wicked ruler, what would they have done?

Would Zacharias and Elizabeth have gone through it all?

I believe the answer, all things considered, is "Yes." Because God chooses those who are faithful, His wonders to perform. After all, the image of the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth adorns most every iconostasis in every Orthodox temple throughout the world and all ages. God works through all things with those who love Him.

With our common struggle, we can all relate – no? How many times have we looked back on the *good ol' days*, the time before the Bug? To many, the days ahead look dark; temptations abound. We are sorely tempted by doom – as if we *do know* the number of our days.

Succumbing to such dark temptations paralyze us, our communities, and our witness to Christ and



1. Quoted by John F. Kennedy. Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey was a French Army general and colonial administrator (<http://www.quotationpage.com/quote/1928.html>).

His Church. I know this from my own struggle, and those whom I serve: complacency abounds. We ask ourselves: What shall we do?

At his son's birth, when Zacharias affirmed that the child's name was *John*, his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed ... and, filled with the Holy Spirit, Zacharias prophesied, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (Luke 1:57 ff.).

All we must do is read the Scriptures and the lives of the saints to see that our struggle is no different. This is the time that God has chosen for me, for you, for all of us to struggle toward our true home, the Kingdom of God. What a blessed time to be alive!

I am reminded of the story of Marshal Lyautey, who once asked his gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow to grow and would not reach maturity for a hundred years. The Marshal replied, "In this case, there is no time to waste, plant this afternoon."¹

What shall we do? We might fight it, it may even seem trite, but the answer is always the same: *Trust God and be faithful*. Pray, fast, give alms – this has not changed. Worry not about the yield; obedience is its own reward. In the meantime, amid our current struggle, many of our communities have witnessed unprecedented growth. Let us rejoice and be glad, for God has visited his people!

I will close with the great Apostle Paul, no stranger to hardship and persecution; for even in our current circumstances, the contest remains the same:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Hebrews 12:1–3

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

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION

Laura Wilson

Many Christians today refer to Scripture as the revelation of God. In the 1980s a council formed with representatives from a variety of Protestant denominations formulated the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.¹ They agreed that "God can be known through His revelation of Himself in His inerrant written Word." Further, they asserted that human language is adequate "to inform us who God is or what He is like," and there is no "new normative revelation" since the time of the Apostles. The doctrine of inerrancy insists that Scripture is the *complete* and *clear* revelation of God. How does this relate to the Orthodox understanding of revelation and Scripture?

Greek-American priest and scholar Fr. John Romanides has claimed that the view of Scripture as "identical with revelation" is the source of all heresies.² This is a bold statement. Yet the nature of God's self-revelation is at the heart of the gospel, and a proper understanding of revelation is truly central to Orthodox faith and practice. Is Scripture the perfect (τέλειον, cognate of τέλος) revelation? The *telos* (τέλος) of created existence is the completion and perfection of all God's work, and how we understand the *content* of the *telos* should point us toward the personal, loving communion with God.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith,

hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.³

The theology of the West, Romanides says, has become the study of the ideas and terminology about God. Revelation is only concepts and words from the past.⁴ But for Orthodox, revelation is the very manifestation of God Himself to the saints. It is personal and not abstract. This is the heart of the difference in our understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. If concepts about God were the highest revelation from God, then inspiration of the Scrip-

in Christ, the created words and symbols become unnecessary. Accepting the Scriptures as the full revelation of God falls short of this glorious perfection. It substitutes temporal understanding for the healing aim of glorification.

The Scriptures witness to God's self-revelation among the prophets and in His Incarnation, but God's self-revelation does not end because the scriptural narrative has closed. Yet this doesn't minimize the importance of the Scriptures. Romanides clarifies that they are the "unique criterion for the authenticity of revelation."¹⁰ The stories and

The mind of Christ is necessary to discern Christ in Scriptures. As the Psalmist says, "In thy light do we see light."¹⁶ This is why we read Scripture within the context of the Church, drawing from the experience of all the saints, rather than our own limited experience. The divine and apostolic life makes the inspired saints able to rightly divide the word of truth.¹⁷

ture to the letter would have made sense, because Scripture is made of words and concepts.⁵ God, surely, would make those created texts and words precise. If God, however, reveals more than concepts, if He *makes Himself known* as He did in the Incarnation, then the content of revelation is uncreated. The Person of Christ is the complete and perfect revelation. The created texts always and only point to the uncreated Being who inspired them, and elevating created things to the level of uncreated revelation is idolatrous. The Scriptures are the *created fruit* of revelation, but not the *uncreated content* of revelation themselves.

Revelation means personal knowledge of the hidden God given by inspiration.⁶ St. Sophrony, a Russian monk of the Twentieth Century, described the experience of inspiration as "the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit within us."⁷ Christ promised the Holy Spirit would flow from the heart as rivers of flowing water.⁸ This experience of the indwelling of the Spirit is not only the source of revelation, but it is also the means of our glorification, which is fulfilled in the vision of God and union with him. In the lower stages of spiritual life, words and concepts are necessary for our training in righteousness in order to make *the man of God complete*.⁹ Yet, when we are made perfect, like the saints

concepts in Scripture, which witness to God's revelatory work, provide the standard for discerning the truth of the experience of the saints throughout the generations.

The Fathers carefully distinguished between knowledge of God in His essence and His energies. God's divine essence is truly incomprehensible for created man; but, in His loving kindness, He makes himself known through His divine energies. This was the subject of the controversy between the philosopher Barlaam and St. Gregory Palamas in the Fourteenth Century. Barlaam placed intellectual reasoning as the highest form of knowledge, so that the most educated necessarily possessed the greatest knowledge. Yet, such a philosophy clearly denies the experience of the fishermen-Apostles and the young virgin Mother. We can see the same tendency in those who treat Scripture as the full revelation of God. They have limited the knowledge of Christ to the text of Scripture and made it dependent upon a person's capacity to interpret Scripture. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy leaves no room for personal experience of God.

So how do we have personal knowledge of God? What revelation is possible for us today? The commandments of Christ given in Scripture don't exist as revelation simply by receiving them. When a person keeps them, however, and is conformed to the

life of Christ, he is deified and transfigured. They become the “law of our whole being.”¹¹ We begin by learning about Christ and imitating Him, but as we are conformed to His likeness we *participate in Christ*. The language of deification and participation in God feels unfamiliar to those who have no theology of revelation as communion. Yet it is the very language of Scripture: “So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us.”¹² Being conformed to the never-ending and selfless love of God draws us into the divine life of God himself, who *is love*.

St. Gregory taught we must be transformed, purifying our hearts through keeping the commandments of God in the ascetic life. Abiding in love by keeping the commandments prepares men for the vision and experience of God in the stages of illumination and deification. As St. Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”¹³ Unlike the abstract conjecture of the philosophers, the experience of holy men is made manifest. The personal encounter and vision of God as the uncreated light is clearly seen in God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures: God gives His name *I am* in the burning bush; the face of Moses shines after receiving the law from God; the flesh of Christ is transfigured in light on Thabor; and Paul is blinded by his vision of the light when he meets the person he is persecuting. While St. Gregory described Barlaam as a self-made theologian “fighting against the revelation of the saints,”¹⁴ his own teaching was rooted in the experiences expressed in Scripture and continued in like manner among the saints. The saints are those who have been made capable of receiving the vision of God and discerning the truth of Scripture. This is not a “new” revelation, but the same revelation of the person of Christ. The lives of the saints are proof of the continuity of God’s self-revelation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. This is precisely what St. Paul describes to the Corinthians, “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”¹⁵

The mind of Christ is necessary to discern Christ in Scriptures. As the Psalmist says, “In thy light do we see light.”¹⁶ This is why we read Scripture within the context of the Church, drawing from the ex-

perience of all the saints, rather than our own limited experience. The divine and apostolic life makes the inspired saints able to rightly divide the word of truth.¹⁷ Having experience of God, they recognize that same experience in the expression of the other saints, especially in the writings of Scripture. Their experience also enables them to correctly express the Orthodox faith and discern the meaning of Scripture.

We distinguish then between the revelation of God and its expression. Throughout the ages the saints have expressed their experience of revelation in the Holy Scriptures, but also by teaching and interpreting Scripture, and in holy lives and martyrdom. None of these expressions are revelation themselves, but each is the fruit of the vision of God. It is the fruit of God’s continued presence in the Church. The saints endure martyrdom, not because of their own zeal or greatness, but because they possess the grace of God and revelation of Christ which bears fruit in their flesh. This embodied perpetuation of the gospel is the Orthodox tradition. And because humans can only experience God by revelation, the saints offer to the rest of humanity entrance into the life of God by the fruit they bear. We can be confident in God’s presence – even without our own personal experience of revelation – because we have seen the saints, heard their teaching, and benefited from the grace of God in their relics. This too is experience and participation, if only still in part.

The holy Scriptures are a vital and necessary part of the correction and training of mankind, but they are not the revelation of God. The revelation of God is the person of Christ, made known to us men for our salvation. The aim of the Scriptures is to safeguard us so that we are moved to the perfect revelation and vision of God.¹⁸ As the fruit of revelation, the Scriptures propel us on to obtain our own perfection. Scripture is a guide to the experience of God, when interpreted by those who have experience of God. This is how the Scriptures have been handed down to us by the saints, leading us ever onward, beyond their own created limits to perfect divine communion.

1. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Application,” *DTS Mosher and Turpin Libraries* (Dallas Theological Seminary, December 13, 1986), accessed June 5, 2021, https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_3.pdf.
2. Met. Hierotheos Vlachos, *Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church: According to the Spoken Teaching of Father John Romanides*, trans. Effie Mavromichali, vols. 1 and 2 (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2011), 1, p. 269.
3. 1 Corinthians 13:8–13.
4. Vlachos, *Empirical Dogmatics*, 1, p. 256.
5. Vlachos, *Empirical Dogmatics*, 1, p. 271.
6. Isaiah 45:15.
7. Sophrony Sakharov, *We Shall See Him As He Is: The Spiritual Autobiography of Elder Sophrony*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2006), p. 119.
8. John 7:37–39.
9. 2 Timothy 3:16. Notice that it is *man* who is made complete in this passage, not the Scripture.
10. Vlachos, *Empirical Dogmatics*, 1, p. 267.
11. Sakharov, *We Shall See*, p. 229.
12. 1 John 4:16.
13. Romans 12:2.
14. Met. Hierotheos Vlachos, “Empirical Theology,” in *St. Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite*, trans. Esther Williams (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1997), p. 364.
15. 2 Corinthians 2:14–16.
16. Psalm 36:9.
17. 2 Timothy 2:15.
18. Vlachos, *Empirical Dogmatics*, 1, p. 205.

Laura Wilson

Laura Wilson is a painter and designer, mother of three daughters, and a founding member of St. Nicholas Orthodox Mission in Jackson, Tennessee. She has an M.Th. in Applied Orthodox Theology and is currently a Ph.D. student in the Antiochian House of Studies.

MARRIAGE AND HOLINESS

Fr. Bassam A. Nassif

Is marriage a path to sanctity and holiness? On seeing an article with *holiness* in the title, one might think that the article discussed monastery life, or a life devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ and the service of His Church. In the Orthodox Church, however, marital life is also a holy life, as marriage is a sacrament (*mysterion*); it carries the sanctifying and purifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Marital life is a grace-filled experience of God's Kingdom, an experience that begins with the priest's announcement at the wedding service: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The late blessed Elder Aimilianos of Simopetra Monastery on Mount Athos vividly summarizes this experience of the Kingdom by saying that "marriage, then, like monasticism, is a longing for the infinite; it is not the satisfaction of a biological drive, but an orientation of the self toward the eschaton. Marriage is a journey, an ascent toward the perfection of paradise, which is, as we have said, a place that we have already entered and into which we continue to progress."¹

This teaching of the Church about holy marriage is confronted by contemporary society's ideology of materialism and consumerism, including all its legislative, economic, sociological, philosophical, and technological facets. In the current view of marriage, self-satisfaction or individual happiness is the goal, and is a "human right" to be upheld and advocated. The Church, however, preaches that marriage is a life in Christ, that involves carrying the Cross of sacrifice, emptying oneself for the other, and forgiving the other. In this article, I present marriage as a living, Christian experience of unity and reconciliation in Christ, leading to an everlasting joy.

MARRIAGE AS LIFE IN CHRIST

The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). When a man and a woman come together in the sacrament of marriage, Christ is in their midst. By the sacra-

mental grace of Holy Matrimony, the couple are not just united to each other in Christ, but also united to Christ. They work together for the salvation of their souls and their children. In this way, they are revealed as an icon of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32). When the husband and wife realize this, they show forth Christ in their lives, or as Elder Aimilianos puts it, they turn into a "theophany," presenting Christ to their social surroundings.²

This is all the work of the Holy Spirit in them, the Spirit that transfigures and deifies them in their connubial life. The sacrament of marriage helps man and woman become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), of the grace of divine love. This divine love is Christ Who is Love, Who sacrifices Himself for His loved ones, Who empties Himself, and Who washes the feet of the other in the humility of love. "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5). Whoever keeps the Word of God, whoever believes and puts his or her belief into practice through honest deeds, discovers the utmost, perfect, true love, and is saved by the grace of God. Thus, divine love cements the nuptial union, and the man and woman become one body in Jesus Christ. This divine love is actually the divine Eucharist, the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ that unites them together as one body.

What does oneness in Christ mean? It means believing in Christ as the only Savior of the family. It also means thinking not as *I*, but as *we*. It means working together as a team, rather than individually, and jointly resolving differences, conflicts and difficulties that arise. This union demands effort, attention, willingness, sacrifice, patience, learning, and prayer. After all, oneness is a gift from God that grows with love.

Our Savior Jesus Christ is the perfect Love that is before the creation of the world. As St. Gregory the Theologian points out: "Marriage is the key that opens the door to discover chastity and perfect love."³ Accordingly, marriage in Christ is a path of

love and salvation. Through this path, He showed us His love, as He showed His glory to the disciples in the marriage at Cana and with the disciples of Emmaus. The experience of this divine love remolds us, purifies us and makes us repent, so we can grow in the love of God. Hence, the earthly love that we begin experiencing in our marital life is transfigured into a purer love, the infinite love of Christ. This is man's and woman's way to salvation. What a great mystery it is, this *mysterion* of Christ and the Church!

leading a family, raising children, and paying dues, physical pain from various diseases, and surprising, unpleasant events that might come up, such as the loss of one's job.

Throughout this journey, the husband and wife get to know each other well: their strengths and weaknesses, values, orientations, dreams, ambitions, differences, and ways of managing everything from material things to intimate relations and parental relationships. Thus, they walk together on this path, getting closer and closer to each other, understand-



MARRIAGE AS UNITY IN CHRIST

Marriage is a lifelong journey of discovery and love. It is a journey the husband and wife decide to embark on, cooperating with each other, helping each other, until they reach their common goal: the Kingdom of God. For marriage is a bridge, a journey, a road, a progression that “starts out from the earth and ends in heaven.”⁴ This journey has some joyful times and other troublesome times. The joyful times include experiencing consolations and witnessing beautiful things like the growth of children, while the other, regular times include the fatigue that comes with facing the challenges of

ing the heart of each other, and becoming more united in and by Christ.

This unity in love is cemented by a deep commitment to serving the other and learning to love the other despite personality differences. By the grace of God, we increasingly learn this love that is ready to sacrifice for the other without egotism, the love that makes our partner's wishes a priority. With dedication, the human being is healed from his or her passions, weaknesses, and egotism. The husband and wife become just as God intended them to be: patient, kind, and loving.

MARRIAGE AS RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST

Conflicts are unavoidable in marital life, because every human is unique and possesses free will. It is impossible for a human not to fall, sin, and hurt the other person with his or her words and behavior, even if he had prepared well for this journey. For this reason, it is necessary, especially in our day and age, for the couple to have one spiritual father, guiding them, advising them, and praying for them, and that through his priestly grace, they may gain forgiveness of sins.

The sacrament of marriage is strengthened and lived through prayer, confession, and walking according to the commandments of the Lord, so that the Holy Spirit guides the couple on the journey, sanctifying them. In this way, marriage unveils itself as a sacrament, because in it the Kingdom of God becomes a lived experience on earth.

Whoever intends to marry has certain expectations of the other, expectations that tend to be idealistic, and unrealistic with regard to the other's weaknesses and attitudes. The intimacy in marital relationships does not just involve physical nudity but also spiritual and psychological vulnerability. During the first three years of marriage, one spouse discovers the other's weaknesses and all that he or she carries from an unbalanced upbringing, bad life experiences, various hidden passions, psychological distresses, and the degree of one's inclinations and disposition towards consumerism, individualism, and a worldly spirit.

These are the inclinations of our distorted human passions, or the fallen, pathological pleasure-seeking in ourselves, like egotism, greed, anger, laziness, coldness, despair, jealousy, and avarice. They spring "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mark 7:21). This shocking realization of our own sinful inclinations, revealed to us through the other's criticism and the realization of the spouse's sinful passions, troubles one's inner balance and jeopardizes the marital relationship. This turmoil can bring into play aggressive emotions like a winter storm. Thus, instead of seeking refuge in God, the husband and wife may back away from dealing with their deteriorating marital life. Marriage, however, is not like a purchased product, with a sales contract and warranty, with the option of returning the item or exchanging it if one discovers a malfunction. If

we may borrow an expression from the commercial world, with marriage "all sales are final," with no refund, return, or exchange.

How, then, can the spouses negotiate the differences that arise, before these turn into conflicts? What is the way, then, that shows marriage to be a life of holiness and peace? The way is through returning to the founder of the gift of marriage and its giver, God Who is the spring of mercy, love, and tenderness. God has granted Christians another sacrament that accompanies the life of married people and comforts them. This other essential sacrament is the sacrament of repentance and confession, the sacrament that heals all wounds by the effect the grace of the Holy Spirit and with the mediation of the spiritual father. The husband and wife choose one spiritual father capable of guiding them on the path to sanctity, love, prayer, patience, and endurance. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit that heals the wounds of their tiring conflicts and releases them from their slavery to sin, giving them patience, vigilance, respect, acceptance of the other, endurance of difficulties, peace, and divine love. It is the life-giving and healing Cross of Jesus Christ.

Why should we take shelter in Jesus Christ and His Cross? In the Orthodox Wedding service, spouses do not make vows to each other, because the spouses' primary commitments are to Christ, Who blesses the union of the couple by the priest present. This union is a gift bestowed by God on the husband and wife. Accordingly, when the husband and wife receive forgiveness from God and taste God's infinite love, they turn to each other to forgive and be forgiven, as do thankful slaves whose merciful master frees them from their debts.

The marital journey to holiness is indeed a journey of life in its fullness. It is a path of repentance, a ladder ascending to heaven, taken by the man and woman with fingers intertwined, so that, if one falls, the other catches up the fallen with the power of Christ. Needless to say, the Church's teaching about marriage remains just beautiful prose, unless Christians catch the *winds* of faith in their sails and set their ship toward the lighthouse of Christ leading to the harbor of salvation. Christians are called to put their faith to work, in order to witness Christ Incarnate and Resurrected as a living Light for the world, to Whom be glory forever and ever.

Fr. Bassam A. Nassif

1. *The Way of the Spirit*, p. 355.
2. *The Church at Prayer*, p. 123.
3. *Moral Poems*, section II, PG, 37:541–542.
4. Elder Aimilaios, *The Church at Prayer*, p. 118.

LIVING SIMPLY AND GIVING SACRIFICIALLY

When they converted to Orthodoxy a few years ago, Peter and Christina Wagenet brought over a distinctive element from their evangelical Protestant upbringing: they are wholly committed to tithing. The Wagenets, who are in their mid-thirties, with three young children and one on the way, tithe a full ten percent of their income to their local parish (St. Luke Antiochian Orthodox Church, Garden Grove, California). Beyond that, they give to various Orthodox ministries, including Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM). The Wagenets are part of OCPM's Matthew 25:36 Fellowship, a community of monthly donors who form the bedrock of annual support for prison ministry.

Christina first heard about OCPM when she read a story about how an Orthodox priest helped a prisoner overcome an addiction to pornography by counseling him to think of the Theotokos. "My mind was blown by that interaction," says Christina, who was gratified to discover that the Orthodox Church had a prison ministry. "I saw that Orthodox theology has the power to truly heal."

The story also helped the Wagenets see prisoners as people who are made in the image of God and who deserve love. "Whether they are serving sentences that are just or unjust, they deserve love," says Peter, who supported Protestant prison ministries before he became Orthodox.

The Wagenets live lives marked by simplicity and frugality. Peter is a software engineer and Christina is a stay-at-home mom, so they live on one salary. They drive one used car, buy used clothing and furniture, and do not take expensive vacations. It has not been easy with a growing family and living in expensive southern California, but their simple lifestyle has enabled them to give generously and sacrificially.

They chose to become monthly donors through OCPM's Matthew 25:36 Fellowship because they believe that monthly giving is the most effective way to donate. "Organizations rely on that consistency," says Peter. "They are better able to budget

and forecast their programs." The Wagenets also liked the fact that the money is automatically earmarked for OCPM, so they are not tempted to use it for something else.

Supporting OCPM has had a particularly poignant effect on Christina. Her father, who was often in trouble with the law, was absent during her formative years. "To me, there is a little bit of healing, because when I read OCPM's stories about prisoners, I think, 'That could be my dad,'" she says.

The Wagenets plan to increase their tithing as their income increases, even with a growing family. "I really believe in doing the most important thing first and the rest will follow," says Peter. "God has blessed us, and the least we can do is give something back."

For more information about Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, go to www.theocpm.org.



YOU HAVE A CAMPER!

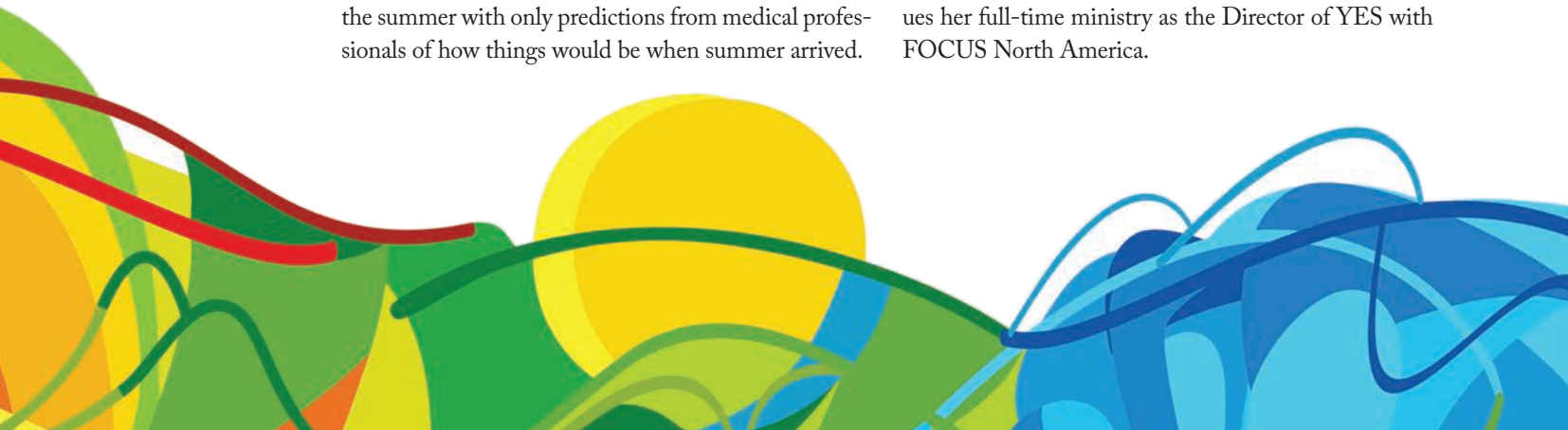
There is nothing quite like the excitement of check-in day at camp. Counselors are dancing and cheering with so much energy as cars pull in the parking lot. Campers can't wait to get out of their cars, anxious to find out which cabin they will be in this year, who their counselor will be, and, of course, to see their friends who they haven't seen since last year! Some campers may be a little more nervous at drop-off, but soon the butterflies go away, and life-long friendships begin. The parents get back in their cars, some more excited than others for a week or two without their children. The dedicated camp counselors begin their work to transform lives and nurture the campers' faith in Jesus Christ through Orthodox Christian community living, worship, education, fellowship, and love. This is the mission of our camping programs in our God-protected Archdiocese.

After the cancellation of the 2020 season of camping because of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Fr. Christopher Shadid, Camp Director at the Antiochian Village, along with his Assistant Directors Cade Scott and James Matthews, spent the fall and winter of 2020 developing plans (and contingency plans) to be able to hold camp in 2021 in a safe, yet effective manner. Another summer without a check-in day and campers arriving in person was not an option that any of us wanted. With the help and guidance of medical advisors Dr. James Rossetti of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Dr. Badie Al-Nemr of Canton, Ohio, along with many others, appropriate Covid-19 safety protocols were established, and a proposal was made to His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH for his approval. Recognizing the need of our young people to have the camp experience to grow in their faith, while also keeping their safety as the highest priority, His Eminence gave his blessing for our camps to open in 2021. Looking back, this may sound easier than it was. At the time, decisions had to be made based on how we hoped things would improve, and plans were set in place months prior to the summer with only predictions from medical professionals of how things would be when summer arrived.

Thanks be to God, the summer of 2021 was a great success. Five of the nine camp programs in the Archdiocese (Antiochian Village, Camp St. Nicholas, Camp St. Thekla, Village Up North, and Kaneesa Camp) safely held camps this summer. The other five camp programs made the tough decision not to have camps this summer. Through the safety protocols that were put in place, there were no reports of any Covid exposure at any of our camps. This year, our camps operated at half-capacity, and some altered the length of stay for the campers. While camp did look different in some ways, our amazing staff members were able still to provide the programs, environment, and experience that our campers know and love. The Covid-19 protocols that were put in place even allowed our camps to re-evaluate how we do things, and in some cases, to create better and more efficient ways to minister to our campers.

Our camp programs are only as good as the dedicated staff members who devote their summers (and much of the year!) to minister to our campers. We must first recognize and thank our 2021 Camp Directors – Fr. Christopher Shadid at Antiochian Village, Ms. Katrina Bitar at Camp St. Nicholas, Fr. Alexander Mackoul at Camp St. Thekla, Dr. Tom Saba at Village Up North, and Fr. James Shadid at Kaneesa Camp – whose leadership and Christ-like love for the campers and staff set the example at each of our camps. Of course, they could not do it alone, and we thank the hundreds of counselors, medical staff, program staff, maintenance staff, and support staff that made our camps happen.

This year we express our gratitude to two Camp Directors who stepped down at the end of this summer. First, we send our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Ms. Katrina Bitar, who has served for the past 18 years as the Camp Director of Camp St. Nicholas in Frazier Park, California. Katrina has lovingly mentored and inspired a whole generation of campers and staff to grow in their faith and love for Jesus Christ. Katrina will still be very active ministering to our youth, as she continues her full-time ministry as the Director of YES with FOCUS North America.



Second, we send our love and gratitude to Khouria Cynthia Horton, who has served as the Executive Director of Camp St. Mary of Egypt (CSME) in Post Falls, Idaho, for the past several years. Kh. Cynthia has been a part of CSME from the beginning, serving in various roles wherever she was needed. When asked to step in as the Executive Director, she did not hesitate. She has improved the program, making it the highlight of the year for campers from the northwest! We wish Kh. Cynthia and Katrina all the best, as they continue to serve the Lord in other ministries. We can't thank them enough for all they have done for their camp programs!

We are blessed in our Archdiocese to have great support for our camp programs. First, we thank His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and our bishops, Their Graces Bishop BASIL, Bishop THOMAS, Bishop ALEXANDER, Bishop JOHN, Bishop ANTHONY and Bishop NICHOLAS, for their unwavering love and guidance for the camp ministry, and their annual visits to the camp programs which the campers and staff all look forward to so much! We thank Mr. Fawaz El-Khoury, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Salim Aboud, CFO, Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, and all the members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, Mr. Dimitri Zeidan, Chairman of the Village Council and the all the members of the Village Council for their support of the camp ministry.

May God grant you all many years!

Just because the summer is over, camp does not end! Our staffs are busy planning events for the fall and winter, as well as summer 2022. The Antiochian Village has already had a busy fall, with programs scheduled throughout the winter and spring:

- Adult Camp – September 17–20, 2021
- Staff Reunion and Gyro Booth at Fort Ligonier Days – October 8–10, 2021
- Alumni Weekend & Fr. John Namie 20 Year Memorial: November 4–7, 2021
- Winter Family Camp – January 14–17, 2022
- Winter Camp – February 18–21, 2022
- Family Camp – May 27–30, 2022

To find out more about any of these events, please visit the Village website at www.avcamp.org. Camp St. Nicholas, Camp St. Raphael, and Camp St. Thekla are also planning Winter Camps in 2022. Please visit the Department of Camping Ministry page on the Archdiocese website at <https://www.antiochian.org/dashboard?name=Camping> for an updated listing of each of our camps and links to their websites for a full list of their upcoming programs.

Stay tuned for 2022 registration information to be posted soon! If you have any questions about our Archdiocese Camping Ministry, feel free to contact our Camping Ministry Chairperson, Khalil Samara, at camping@antiochian.org.

CHARITIES CORNER

The Committee on Charitable Outreach has been busy over the past months working to expand our outreach and to help parishes and organizations by providing emergency funding during the COVID pandemic. Over the past twelve months the Committee has provided more than \$70,000 to enable our churches to provide direct assistance to parishioners affected by the pandemic. In addition, Food for Hungry People and Charitable Outreach, under the very capable direction of Robin Lynn Nicholas, has provided \$16,000 in grant funding to charitable efforts and organizations associated with our Archdiocese to support outreach programs during these turbulent times.

Since she became Administrator of the Children's Relief Fund (CRF), Deborah Brown has continued to vet and monitor our overseas contacts to ensure that funds are transmitted securely and directed to the appropriate recipients. To date \$51,000 has been securely disbursed to children in Palestine.

Please note: We understand that some of our CRF donors have expressed concern that money has not been disbursed to the sponsored children in Lebanon. We delayed disbursement until we could ascertain that transmission of funds would be safe and that monies would reach the designated children. As a result, no funds were disbursed to Lebanon during 2019 and 2020. However, that situation is now being rectified. On June 23, 2021, the Children's Relief Fund made an initial disbursement of \$6,875 for 2019 and 2020 to our neediest children in Lebanon. Once we have received confirmation that these funds have been properly received by our sponsored children, we will disburse the remainder of the 2019 and 2020 funding. Through The WORD Magazine's "Charities Corner," we will keep our donors apprised of progress in these matters.

FUNDING FOR LEBANON

We were grateful to work collaboratively with Mona Houcheime from California this past spring in distributing over \$10,000 among three Orthodox schools (Beirut Annunciation Orthodox College, Zahret El Ihsan Orthodox School, and Ecole Des Trois Docteurs Orthodox School) that were damaged by the blast in Beirut last year. The money will be used for computer equipment.

Charitable Outreach Committee: Anne Bourjaily Thomas, Chair, Fr. Ted Pulcini, Robin Lynn Nicholas

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
CRF Administrator
(917) 991-7192
db0253@aol.com or
childrensrelieffund@gmail.com

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

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Children's Relief Fund
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