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THE WORD

CONTENTS



COVER: THE HOLY TRINITY
Icon handwritten
by Janet Jaime
eleusa@cox.net

- 3 EDITORIAL
by Bishop JOHN
- 5 THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST AS
SPIRITUAL FATHER IN THE
ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL LIFE
by Bishop THOMAS Joseph
and Peter Schweitzer
- 11 JUSTIN MARTYR,
DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
by Fr. Dan Daly
- 16 CREATING A DYNAMIC MARRIAGE
by Fr. Aaron Warwick
- 19 GRIEF IS A FUNNY THING
by Gregory Abdalah
- 20 ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE
- 21 FR. NICOLA YANNEY:
THE FIRST PRIEST ORDAINED
BY THE FIRST BISHOP
by Amy Hadley
- 28 YOUNG PROFESSIONALS
THIRD CONFERENCE
- 30 COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
- 32 SCOUTING AWARDS
- 33 MAKE SOME MEMORIES AT THE
ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION
by Alan Abraham
- 34 ORATORICAL FESTIVAL
by Cassidy Lee Irwin

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TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR TIME



BISHOP JOHN

Our father and chief shepherd Metropolitan JOSEPH often suggests to young clergy and those seeking a spiritual life to take control of their time. I would like to reflect on this counsel a bit, because I am captivated by its implications. This guidance carries the whole *phronema* of Orthodox spirituality and expresses it with precision and simplicity. While it sounds simple to the modern ear, it relays the depth of our faith tradition.

Taking control of one's time requires us to be deliberate. To plan well, we should identify our goals and responsibilities, and then prioritize them. This is best done after daily prayer: we can make a list of the tasks and responsibilities our position and each day brings. We can then assess how much energy these tasks will take, and when they need to be completed. Next, we can then put them into a schedule that will work for us. To do this well, however, we need

to be realistic in what we expect of ourselves. Sometimes we may pair up difficult things with fun or easy ones, so that we can provide ourselves with an incentive or reward to get the more difficult things done first. If we have a task that is daunting, or one we just don't want to do, it may be better to get it out of the way first. Then it won't distract us as we do things that are more pleasant or enjoyable.

Being deliberate also means making sure that our tasks are appropriate to our high Christian calling, and that God would be pleased to bless them. Not everything is good and beneficial. Anything that would distract us from living integrated and holy lives should be avoided. We can avoid sin by choosing to remove ourselves from the place we sin, or by being with someone with whom we would not sin. Most temptation has an element of intensity which passes within a relatively short time, if we choose to busy ourselves with something better. Most often and effective is calling on

God through prayer. The name of the Lord has power in itself. Remember how, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus said “I am” the soldiers fell to the ground like dead men. Calling on Christ and doing something good will protect and redirect us.

Taking control of our time means keeping our Christian calling always in mind and using it as a guide as we set priorities and make decisions. We are called to love God with all of our heart, mind and soul, to take care of each other, and to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This last instruction involves mission and evangelization, and these begin wherever we find ourselves now. Be ever ready and willing to witness, but wait for the circumstances to be most fertile.

Taking control of our time means being responsible. Our Church and our families are relying on us to witness and work to the measure of the talents with which God blesses us. Our “fair share” in this is not a fraction of the whole – we need not fear that we will lack anything – as God blesses each of us abundantly and calls us to serve out of that abundance. Serving allows us to see God’s hand in His creation up close and personally, a great blessing.

Taking control of our time means being faithful. We need to be faithful to God, ourselves and our neighbors. No one reading this needs to be reminded that our neighbor is everyone else, and that everyone includes even family members who are sometimes most resistant to our witness or to what is reasonable. Nevertheless, we are called to be faithful. As a guide to being faithful, we can ask questions of ourselves like: What does God want us to do? Who are we and what is our responsibility? What is reasonable, honest and fair to both myself and the other? This “self talk” can be helpful in sorting out confused thoughts and feelings. We often have conflicting ideals and goals, but this exercise of discernment is very helpful.

Taking control of our time means taking charge of ourselves. It is a kind of ascetism that allows us to be deliberate and reasonable about how we eat, exercise, pray and work. It involves being deliberate about what we read and see. We do have control of much of what we put into our minds, bodies and souls. Taking charge of what goes in will determine how we feed or starve each of the many conflicting passions that are part of life in this fallen world.

Taking charge or control of our time is the way of the Christian life. It is ascetic inasmuch as it calls us to be good stewards and exercise self-control. Being deliberate is our best way of making good, holy and reasonable choices. It will allow us to be faithful to God and each other. It is the only way of integrity, honesty, peace, and joy, because it is the only way to be genuine in our Christian call.

Through the prayers of our Metropolitan JOSEPH, O Lord, have mercy on us and save us.

The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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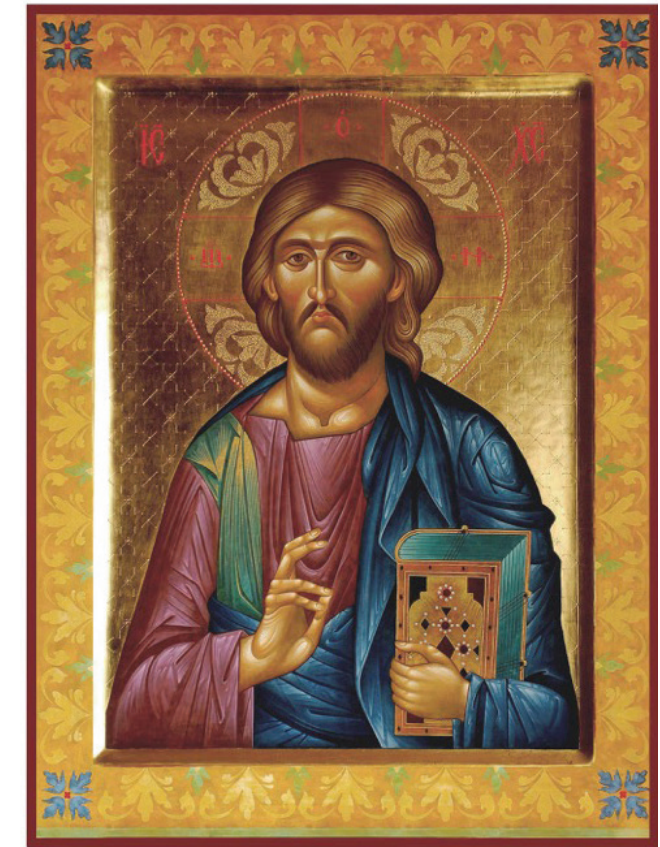
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e-mail: WORDMAG@AOL.COM

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registrar@antiochian.org

The Role of the Priest as Spiritual Father in the Orthodox Spiritual Life

Bp. THOMAS Joseph and Peter Schweitzer



Icon handwritten by Janet Jaime eleusa@cox.net

AS A WAY OF LIFE, RATHER THAN A RELIGION, ORTHODOXY PRESUMES AND PRESUPPOSES A PARTICULAR WORLDVIEW THAT IS UNIQUE AND CHRIST-CENTERED. IT IS A WAY OF BEING IN THE WORLD, A WAY OF INTERACTING WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AS WELL AS THE ENTIRE COSMOS. IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PRIEST’S SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD AND THE MODE OF ITS EXPRESSION IN THE CHURCH.

The notion of spiritual fatherhood has a long and venerable tradition within the holy Orthodox Church. We find Saint Paul reminding the people of Corinth of his spiritual fatherhood and paternal care for the people of Corinth. “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” In reminding the Corinthians of his spiritual fatherhood, Saint Paul affirms the generative nature of the role. The fruit of their paternal guidance is healthy Christians who are freed from the passions and illnesses associated with sin.

The tradition reflected in this passage is one we still practice today: our tradition of calling our deacons and priests “father,” and of referring to our Orthodox Christian spiritual elders through the centuries as “the fathers of the Church.” This concept has come under attack from all sides today. On the one hand, we are witnessing a period of profound gender confusion. Our young people are being taught that gender is not significant and that male and female, father and mother, are interchangeable. We are being bombarded on television and social media with the confusing and dangerous message that we can choose or change our gender to accommodate our whims and feelings. Obviously, this does significant harm to the notion of spiritual fatherhood and is entirely incompatible with

the Gospel and the Orthodox way of life.

On the other hand, some who study the Bible point to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel where He says, “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” Taken out of context, this leads some to believe that calling a priest father is contrary to the words of Christ Himself. Yet, as in all things, context is key.

These words are found in Saint Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 23, Verse 9. In this “call-no-man-father” passage, our Lord is making a particular point for a very particular audience. He is contrasting His own living truth with the teachings of the “scribes and Pharisees,” who were convinced that only they understood God’s Law and were fit to interpret it. Christ is accusing the rabbis opposed to him of deliberately twisting God’s Word to suit their own desires. Christ stood in opposition to those who seek to elevate themselves and place themselves before God.

Our Lord wants true teachers. He wants true spiritual fathers who can take on the mantle of spiritual leadership. But He only wants teachers and fathers who understand that they themselves are not the source of the Tradition which they are passing on, but are instead conduits for the Tradition of God.

Before we examine the qualities of priestly spiritual

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”

fatherhood, we must inquire as to the nature of the priesthood. The priest is not a functionary ordained to dispense the holy Mysteries of the Triune God. Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science which seeks the healing of every person who approaches the Church. The right practice of medicine requires a good physician, a professional physician, and this applies to spiritual healing as well. The priest is properly and foundationally a spiritual physician who cures. In his book, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, Metropolitan HIEROTHEOS Vlachos notes that the priest has two roles: 1. to perform the holy Mysteries, and 2. to heal people. For the priest to save his own soul and heal others, the spiritual priesthood must be the foundation of the sacramental priesthood. What is this spiritual priesthood? According to His Eminence, those who possess spiritual priesthood have attained noetic prayer, which is to say that their *nous* has been cleansed of the passions, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the *nous* makes healing possible. This priesthood helps man to

go from the image of God to the likeness of God. It can guide him to deification, which is in fact the healing of man, or, rather, which manifests this healing. The spiritual priesthood is characterized by the ability to free people from their passions, to cleanse the *nous*, and to acquire the Holy Spirit. This is such an awesome enterprise that Saint John Chrysostom wrote to Saint Basil attempting to justify his refusal to be made a bishop.

Saint Gregory the Theologian writes, “It is necessary first to be purified, then to purify; to be made wise, then to make wise; to become light, then to enlighten; to approach God, then to bring others to him; to be sanctified, then to sanctify. . .” (*Orations* 2, 71). This is a prerequisite for true spiritual priesthood and an undeniable quality of the spiritual father. Thus, before the spiritual father can guide and assist others in the Christian life, he first needs to live it himself. He must be a “prime example to the believers” (1 Timothy 4:2) and “fully living the gospel.” According to Saint Basil the Great, “his very life must reflect a prime example by following every commandment of the Lord.” His example must speak louder than his words. He must inspire with his virtuous lifestyle. He needs to build people up with his love and fatherly affection, since according to Saint John of the Ladder, “a true shepherd shows forth or is proven through his love, because the Great Shepherd was crucified out of love.”

The Holy Fathers are quite insistent on this point. Priests are to be spiritual fathers, and the qualities necessary for them to perform the singularly important task of healing presumed their freedom from the passions. Indeed, Saint John Chrysostom writes that a priest has to have more attentiveness and spiritual strength even than the hermits themselves! For if the hermits, who are freed from the city, the marketplace, and its people, are not secure in the spirit, how much more strength and vigor needs to be exercised by the priest in order to be able to snatch his soul away from all infection and keep its spiritual beauty inviolate. That is why he affirms that the clergy who live in the world need even more purity than the monks. Metropolitan HIEROTHEOS Vlachos cites Saint Symeon the New Theologian in emphasizing this point. His Eminence writes, “Anyone who has not abandoned the world and been counted worthy to receive the Holy Spirit as were the holy Apostles, who has not undergone purification and illumination and been found worthy to ‘contemplate the unapproachable light,’ – such a man would

not dare to accept the priesthood and the authority over souls, or to push himself to accept such!”

Saint Dionysios the Areopagite emphasizes this point by comparing the three degrees of the spiritual life (purification, illumination, and deification) to the three degrees of the priesthood (deacon, priest, and bishop). According to Saint Dionysios, ordination to any of these degrees of priesthood presupposes acquisition of the corresponding spiritual state. Metropolitan HIEROTHEOS comments on the Areopagite’s teaching by writing:

Since the task of the deacon is to purify others of passions, he should himself, prior to ordination, have reached a stage of purification so that he is himself a living exponent of the practical philosophy. Since according to the patristic teachings it is the priest’s task to illuminate others, his ordination presupposes that he has an illuminated nous, which, as we have seen, is a degree of theoria. Thus the priest must remember God unceasingly in prayer, must know spiritual work, be fluent in Holy Scripture and be able to contemplate the inner principles of all created things. As for the bishop, since his primary task is to perfect the people of God by the inner principles of theology, he must experience the mystical theology, and live in communion with God. This close relationship with God makes him a prophet, a divine initiate capable of mystically imparting the word of truth to the people of God. The form which the ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops takes is equally indicative of the spiritual condition which they are assumed to have reached in order to fulfill these essential tasks. For how can people be helped if the helpers have no personal experience of the task which they are to carry out?

This is daunting, I know. If we are not trembling and filled with fear at the thought of our awesome responsibility before God and His people, nothing can move us! Yet, I have just begun. This is merely an introduction to the topic of spiritual fatherhood.

Before describing the qualities of a spiritual father, it is necessary to discuss the indispensable role of asceticism and *hesychasm* in the life of the church and of the spiritual father himself. These are not particular to the life of a monastic, but are essential tools for all Christians striving to live the life of faith. As Elder Ephraim of Vatopaidi wrote:

Hesychasm is not lived only by monastics and those who have foresworn the world. Hesychasm is

an inner condition, it is a continuous dwelling in God and purity of the nous. Hesychasm is the way in which the realm of the heart is revealed, the center of our existence, that which we may term our person. This is the only way in which people can be reborn spiritually and have their hypostatic (personal) state emerge. Without this ascetic training, there is no point to the sacramental life of the Church, which can act towards perdition as well as salvation.

Elder Ephraim writes “It is the ONLY way in which people can be reborn spiritually . . .” If we desire to be spiritual fathers, we ourselves must live a life of asceticism and hesychasm. Hieromonk Alexios Trader, a monk of Karakallou Monastery on Mount Athos and a former teacher at Saint Tikhon’s Seminary, points out:

Hesychasm is the Spirit of the Law that enlivens the Law. It is the incense of sweet spiritual fragrance that makes asceticism more than self-denial and the divine services more than rites following detailed rubrics. Through hesychasm, asceticism and the divine services take on an angelic radiance and the freshness of paradise. Above all, hesychasm strengthens the mode of faith and purifies the nous, so that one looks at all the world, all one’s problems, all of creation from a new vantage point, the vantage point of the mind of Christ, which in the Greek is the nous of Christ, the highest, most noble, and most piercing vision of reality that the Saint can hope to gain. In this way, hesychasm offers the struggler a way of coping with the thoughts that transforms the suffering into union with our suffering Savior who through suffering opens unto us the gates of paradise.

Our invitations to “come and see” that we extend to non-Orthodox will be fruitless unless we gradually draw them into this way of being in the world. If we invite them without this, we are doomed to failure. All too often our pastoral efforts are reduced to rational argumentation such as “We are the original Christian Church,” refutations of papal infallibility, or historical reasons for our rejection of papal claims. The rational model doesn’t work because we are not providing our audience with a new way of *seeing*. Father Alexios writes, “Reason, unenlightened by the nous, continues to produce thoughts that are based on reason’s own self-preservation and self-glorification. In order for thoughts to be controlled and properly ordered, the nous enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit must

be re-established as king of the human heart. The traditional path in which this takes place is known as hesychasm.”

A good father shows his children the way. He teaches them through demonstration and example. Let me give you an example. When you first teach your child how to ride a bike, you don’t take out an owner’s manual and begin to read from it. No, you get on a bike and show the child how it’s done. The same is true for us who are called to be spiritual fathers. We must be practicing asceticism and hesychasm, so that the knowledge we pass on to our spiritual children is purified and enlightened.

Catechesis is surely necessary, but it must be Orthodox catechesis, and this means we begin with asceticism and hesychasm. When we explain to them fasting and standing for the long services, we place those teachings in the context of these two great pillars. This is our way of life and it must be clear from the outset. Do not be tempted to think these are only for the advanced. The process of purification, illumination, and deification are the only way to salvation in Christ. If we wait to introduce these subjects for fear of driving them away, we will surely lose them. They will walk away and “see” the Orthodox as a quaint, ethnic enclave of people stuck in the past.

In a world filled with anxiety, chaos, and disorder, people are unknowingly clamoring for an alternative. For those in the world who are mired in the passions and unable to control burdensome and fearful thoughts, we have a life of joy and true hope to offer them. This is the task of the spiritual father who lives the ascetic life in hesychasm.

In this context, what are some of the qualities, apart from the awesome prerequisites of which I have already mentioned, that make a spiritual father? First, the spiritual father must be a warrior. He must be trained in the art of spiritual warfare and capable of engaging in battle on his own behalf and for his spiritual children. This means he must be able to recognize and diagnose the passions and various illnesses that afflict the modern soul. He must know the corresponding virtues that root out these passions. This requires intimate and thorough knowledge of the Church Fathers. This should include such ascetics as Saints Barsanuphius and John, Abba Dorotheos, particularly his work *Practical Teaching on the Christian Life*, and Saint John Climacus’s *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* as a starting place. The spiritual father as warrior must know the weapons at his disposal, as well as when and how to use them. A warrior has manly courage. The Psalm-

ist exhorts us, “Be stouthearted and wait on the Lord!” (Psalm 27). As a spiritual father, the warrior must have the strength to perform ascetical feats for himself and his children. He must be able to pray for them when they can’t pray, and fast for them when they don’t have the strength. A warrior must also be a leader who exhorts, cajoles, guides, and corrects when necessary.

Dr. Constantine Cavernos provides a wonderful illustration of some of the other qualities of a good spiritual father. He writes, “The Holy Elder Philotheos (Zervakos) points out the qualities of the good Confessor or Spiritual Father using St. Arsenios of Paros (1800–1877) as his exemplar. These qualities are particularly the following: humility, gentleness, patience, discernment, compassion and love. These virtues, he says, Father Arsenios eminently possessed. Thus, he remarks, St. Arsenios received all with love and paternal affection, and gave to all with understanding and discernment the ‘medicines’ necessary for the therapy of their souls. Besides other necessary ‘medicines’ he used to give to all two common ones: the medicine of repentance and the medicine of God’s compassion and love. He exhorted all to repent sincerely, and not to despair on account of their many sins, but to have hope in God’s immeasurable compassion, realizing that God accepts sinners when they repent. As proof of God’s great compassion he cited the examples of the Prodigal Son, the Thief, the Harlot, the Publican, and many others. Through love and gentleness Saint Arsenios led many to repentance and salvation.

Father Philotheos Zervakos goes on to give a very moving example of how St. Arsenios acted as a Confessor.

A certain girl from the island of Syros (one of the Cyclades Islands, not far from Paros) went to the Convent of the Transfiguration of Christ on Paros to visit her sister, who was a nun there. The latter had previously been informed that her sister had deviated from the right path; and when she was notified that her sister was outside the gate of the convent and wanted to see her, she at once began to scream and say: “Go away, go far away from the convent, because you are defiled and will defile the convent of the nuns.” And taking along with her as helpers some other nuns, she went outside the convent. When she saw her sister waiting outside the gate, instead of feeling compassion for her for having been wounded by the soul-destroying enemy, instead of sharing her pain, embracing, then kissing her, and taking care to heal her wounds, and leading her to repentance

and confession, thereby saving her, she dashed against her like a lioness. And aided by other nuns, she struck her in the face, on the head, wounded her seriously, and with wild shouts and threats drove her away. “Go away,” she kept telling her, “you foul harlot, who came here to the convent, to this holy place to defile it also. Go away, I will kill you, to wash away the shame you have brought to our family.” She replied: “I erred, forgive me, my sister, don’t you share my pain?” – “No,” she replied, “you are not my sister, you are a harlot.” – “Where shall I go?” asked her sorrowful sister. “Go and drown yourself, go and kill yourself,” replied the other. The miserable girl fled from the convent full of wounds and bloodstained. When she was about 800 yards away, she sat down by the road, weeping bitterly; and groaning painfully she said: “What shall become of me the wretch? Where shall I go, when even my sister, to whom I hastened to seek help and consolation, drove me away, wounded me, and filled me with despair? There remains nothing for me now but to go and drown myself in the sea! O my God, help me, the wretch.”

Through the dispensation of God, Who does not want the death of the sinner but his repentance, it happened that St. Arsenios was going up to the convent. When he saw the girl crying and wounded, he felt compassion for her, and approaching her he said: “What is the matter, my child? Why are you weeping? Who has caused you the wounds?” – “My sister, Elder,” she replied, “together with some nuns.” – “And why did they wound you?” – “Because, Elder, some corrupt men and women led me astray, and I became a harlot. But I realized that I did not do well and I came to the convent to seek protection, help, from my sister. And behold, Father, what they did to me. Is that the way nuns act, having fled from the world in order to save their souls? What do you, Father, counsel me? To go to the sea and drown myself, or to go and hurl myself down a precipice?” “My child, I do not give you such counsel. I love you as my child, and if you wish I shall take you with me and heal the wounds of your soul and body.” – “And where are you going to take me, Elder?” – “To the convent, my child.” – I beg you not to take me to that convent, where my sister is together with those wicked nuns, because they will kill me – they declared this to me clearly, and if I insisted on remaining there they would certainly

have killed me. You, Elder, are a good Father, but those nuns are criminals.”

“Come, my dear child, and be not afraid, they will not kill you, because I shall turn you over to Christ, and no one will be able to harm you.” – “In that case, Elder, since you are going to turn me over to Christ, I am not afraid of them, because Christ is much more powerful than they.”

After he had encouraged and consoled her, St. Arsenios took her by the hand and led her up to the convent. And like another good Samaritan, by means of fatherly and affectionate words he exhorted her to repentance and confession. When she had repented sincerely and confessed candidly, he cleaned and dressed the wounds of her body and soul. Having clothed her with clean garments, those of repentance, he introduced her into the spiritual fold of the convent and included her with his other rational sheep.

She made such progress in the monastic life – in fasting, self-control, vigils, prayer, temperance and the rest of the virtues, and in the keeping of the Commandments of God — that she surpassed all the other nuns. Thus there was fulfilled the saying of the divine herald Paul the Apostle: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

Wishing to correct the nuns who had acted wrongly towards her, the Saint called all the nuns into the church of the convent and sharply rebuked those who wounded her, especially her sister, saying: “The good father of the parable, upon seeing from afar his prodigal son – who had spent his whole life living prodigally – returning to him, hastened to meet him, embraced him, kissed him, took him to his house, removed his old garments and clothed him with new ones and new shoes. He rejoiced greatly, because his son was dead, and was alive again, he was lost and was found. Christ came down from Heaven not in order to save the righteous, who have no need, but sinners. He came to save the lost sheep. He mingled, conversed and ate with publicans, harlots, sinners, towards whom he showed His love and affection. In this manner, that is, through His love, He saved them. But you did the opposite. Although you knew that the incorporeal wolf, the devil, had seriously wounded her soul, instead of feeling sorry for her, and running to embrace and kiss her, to rejoice, to save her from the danger of further sin, you felt hatred for her and ran to kill her. And

because you were unable to kill her, you incited her to go and kill herself, to drown herself in the sea. Now learn from me, your Spiritual Father, that you are not nuns, you are not Christians, you are not even human beings. If you had a sheep and saw that it was at a precipice and was in danger of perishing, I think you would have hastened to save it. Why? Because it is an animal. If you show so much concern for an animal, should you not have shown concern for your sister, who is not an animal, but a human being, has a soul, which is worth more than the whole world? She was on the precipice of perdition, and although she came to seek your help, you pushed her so that she might fall down faster.

Therefore, you are devoid of compassion, devoid of affection, devoid of sympathy; you are murderesses. For this reason I impose upon you the penance of not receiving Holy Communion for three years, if you do not recognize the great sin which you inconsiderately fell into. Repent, confess your sin, sigh, weep bitterly, and ask for forgiveness from God, from me, your Spiritual Father, and from those sisters who did not agree to your sinful act.

Inasmuch as the nuns became aware of their sin, repented and wept bitterly, St. Arsenios forgave them and moderated their penance. Upon the sister, he imposed the penalty of not receiving Holy Communion for a year, because she provided the occasion and cause of the sin, while upon the others, that of not partaking of Holy Communion for six months, because they shared in the responsibility.

In this story, we witness a true spiritual father demonstrating humility, meekness, discernment, and compassion. We also witness chastisement for the purposes of correction, rather than punishment. Saint Arsenios was a father who possessed deep humility, much like Saint Anthony the Great and Saint Seraphim of Sarov or many other saintly monastic elders. These never sought a name for themselves. In fact, they desired just the opposite. True humility recognizes that we are mere vessels through which the Holy Spirit is working, and any benefit is not of our own making. Humility also requires that we are careful and prudent when we offer direction and counsel, never placing too heavy a burden on a spiritual child, lest they break and fall into despair.

Finally, the spiritual father must be prophetic. It is

the duty of a spiritual father to speak the truth in love in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). As Nathan the prophet confronted King David, and Saint Basil the Holy Fool chastised Ivan the Terrible, a spiritual father must speak out against the false prophets and the ravenous wolves that seek to do harm to his spiritual children. The father as prophet does not desire to be liked. In fact, such a desire diminishes his ability to be prophetic. There will be times the spiritual father must speak hard truths and prescribe bitter medicine for the good of his children. This can't be done if the father seeks popularity rather than the health of the soul.

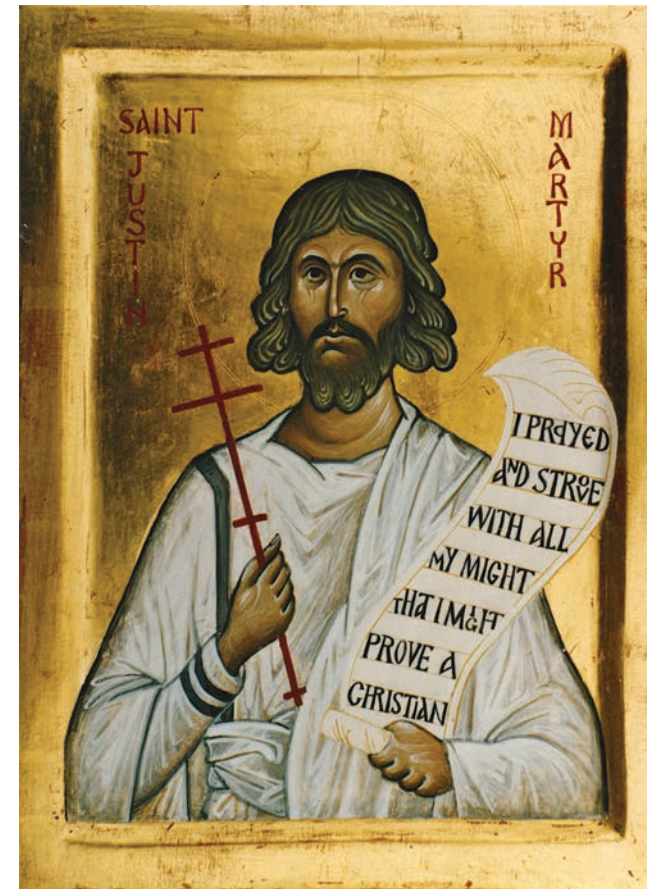
In order to do all of this, the lives of godly spiritual fathers must be blameless and above reproach. Our spiritual children must see in us a God-seeker and a God-pleaser, not a charlatan or a hypocrite. A spiritual father must be a man of noetic prayer. He must carve out time for this before any of the various administrative duties take his attention away from this essential spiritual work.

As spiritual fathers, we will have to give an account of our own lives, as well as the lives of our spiritual children whom we have begotten in Christ. Yet, the thrice-holy God provides the grace with which we perform these awesome works. Moses was “slow of speech.” Isaiah confessed he was “a man of unclean lips.” The king and prophet David succumbed to adultery and committed murder. Jonah fled from the God of Israel. None were perfect, but all were called to this duty of spiritual fatherhood. Almighty God performs the task through unworthy vessels of clay. We need only pray, fast, struggle. Consider the holy services to be your lifeline, and not just only a Sunday or feast-day obligation. Commune frequently, with frequent confession. Humble yourself.

Do not believe what the world tells you about self-worth, and pleasure and meaning. The world lies to you. Look to the church, and the Scriptures and the Saints for your role models and instructions for living.

When we enter before the dread judgement seat of God, we will be asked the following: Were you purified in order to purify? Were you illumined so as to illumine? Were you perfected in order to perfect? The yoke of spiritual fatherhood demands no less than this. If our spiritual generation is to be fruitful, our fatherhood must reflect the life of Christ.

May the Most Holy Theotokos protect you and may the thrice-holy God bless you and give you the strength for the task at hand.



Icon by Aidan Hart, www.aidanharticons.com

JUSTIN MARTYR, DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Fr. Dan Daly

On the 22nd of February 156 A.D., one of the most important Christian bishops of the First and Second Century was martyred in Asia Minor, St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. St. Polycarp had been a disciple of St. John the Apostle. He met with St. Ignatius of Antioch on his path to martyrdom in Rome in about 110 A.D. He himself had been to Rome to meet Pope Anicetus over the date of Pascha. According to his own testimony, St. Polycarp had served the Lord for 86 years. The story of his martyrdom is the earliest account of a Christian martyr after that of St. Stephen. The occasion of his martyrdom was very possibly the writing of the most important defense of the Christian faith in the Second Century, written by St. Justin Martyr.¹ Although Justin is not the only apologist from the Second Century, he is the most important. His defense of the Christian faith stands as an example for Christians of every era. He was a man of learning and great courage. Like St. Polycarp, he too would eventually suffer martyrdom.

St. Justin was born of pagan parents in Flavia Neapolis, the ancient Shechem in Samaria, about the year 100 A.D. As a young man he chose the intellectual life of the philosopher. The Second Century was replete with religions and philosophies. According to his own words, his search for wisdom began with the school of the Stoics, and continued with the Peripatetics and then with the Pythagoreans. He found none of these schools satisfactory. The Stoics could not answer his questions about God; the Parapatetic teacher demanded payment “up front.” The Pythagorean insisted that he first study music, astronomy, and geometry. Not having the “prerequisite courses,” St. Justin moved on. For a time he found the philosophy of Plato appealing.²

He insists that there will be a resurrection of the dead and that “those who lived wickedly” and who did not believe what God has taught us through Christ will be punished.

Most likely in the city of Ephesus St. Justin came upon an old man who, having first convinced St. Justin that the philosophy of Plato was not the answer, introduced him to the Old Testament Prophets. “Straight-away a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me.”³ The philosopher now turned to Christ. The fearlessness of death on the part of the Christians was very influential in his conversion. St. Justin traveled through Ephesus and eventually came to Rome, where he established a school. Like St. Polycarp, St. Justin would also end his earthly life as a martyr in the year 165 A.D. The record of his trial and death have been preserved.⁴

Although he was a prolific writer, only three of his authentic works have been preserved. These are *Apology I*, *Apology II*, and his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*. (The two apologies originally may have been only one). His willingness to defend the Christian faith stands as an example for Christians of all ages. Earlier Christian writings were addressed to the Christian communities. With these second-century apologies, Christian writers now address the outside world.

THE FIRST APOLOGY THE DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

The First Apology is addressed to the “Emperor Antoninus Pius, to his sons...and to the whole peo-

ple of the Romans.”⁵ He hardly could have been more open about his defense of Christians. He even admits to being one of the persecuted. At issue was the unjust persecution of Christians. Christian people were being persecuted not for any crimes, but simply for being Christian. “If anyone acknowledges that he is a Christian, you punish him on account of the acknowledgment.”⁶ “We demand that the charges be investigated, and that, if they be substantiated, they be punished as they deserve. But if no one can convict us of anything, true reason forbids you for the sake of wicked rumors, to wrongly blame us.”⁷ Justin asks that the Emperor be “fair and equitable....” “It is incumbent on the lover of truth, by all means ... to chose and do and say what is right.” “By mere application of a name, nothing is decided, either good or evil....”⁸ It is a matter of justice.

Shakespeare’s Juliet asked her famous question “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet?”⁹ Second-century Christians would respond that there is indeed much in a name, and that the name Christian has the power of both life and death. For Justin it meant his physical death, but eternal life.

ATHEISM

In the Roman Empire, atheism was more of a political crime than a heresy. Allegiance to the Empire meant allegiance to their gods. Christians could not in any way pay homage to pagan gods or worship them. This unwillingness was seen as atheism.

To the charge of atheism, Justin asks, “Were not some of the ancient philosophers atheists?” “And those who now adopt such instruction are not restrained by you; but, on the contrary, you bestow prizes and honors on those who euphoniously insult gods.”¹⁰

Justin admits that Christians are atheists as far as the pagan gods are concerned, but they believe in the “most true God,” whom he identifies as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This God they adore and worship. If Christians are punished they must be punished for evil deeds, not simply for being Christian.

The gods found in the pagan shrines are made by “carving and cutting, casting and hammering, fashioning the materials.” “And often out of vessels of dishonor [interesting remark], by merely changing the form, they make into what they call a god....” Here Justin is of the same mind as the psalmist, who ridiculed

the pagan gods as human fabrications and as being actually demons.¹¹

WE WORSHIP THE TRUE GOD

“But we have received by *tradition* [my emphasis] that God does not need the material offerings which men can give, seeing indeed, that He Himself is the provider of all things.” “And we have been taught that He in the beginning did of His goodness, for man’s sake, create all things out of unformed matter; and if men by their works show themselves worthy of His design, they are deemed worthy, and so we have received – of reigning in company with Him, being delivered from corruption and suffering.”¹² Christians are not atheists: they worship Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. “We reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third....” Justin professes his faith in the Trinity before any ecumenical council, and before the canonization of the New Testament books.

Faith in Christ brought about a complete transformation of life on the part of those who follow him. Whereas they were once a people who delighted in fornication, wealth, and magical arts, they are now a people of chastity, generosity and love for their enemies. Many men and women “remain pure [i.e., celibate] at the age of sixty or seventy.” Many “have reformed intemperate habits.” God calls the sinners to repentance. St. Justin then presents the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5. In injuries, Christians must be patient and forgiving. The faith must be more than a profession of their belief in Christ. “Those who do the works shall be saved.”

St. Justin even assures the emperor that they acknowledge him as king and ruler of men. They are obliged to pay him “taxes both ordinary and extraordinary.” “To God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you.”¹³

He admits that there are similarities between what the ancient philosophers taught and what Christians teach. “If, therefore, on some points we teach the same things as poets and philosophers who you honor, and on other points are fuller and more divine in our teaching, and if we alone afford proof of what we assert, why are we unjustly hated more than others?” *Here, I believe, Justin speaks not only to the Emperor, but to people of our own times.* So long as certain values remain the opinion of philosophers or any other human agency, no one “hates” them: “My values are as good as

yours.” If certain truths and values, however, are taught as coming forth from God, and are of divine authority, then, as the Lord says, “They will hate you.” That is as true today as it was in the world of St. Justin.

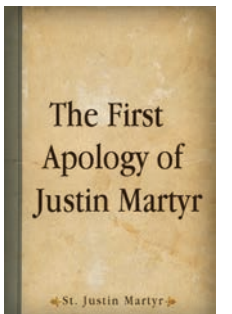
He insists that there will be a resurrection of the dead and that “those who lived wickedly” and who did not believe what God has taught us through Christ will be punished.

He ridicules the pagan divinities with their absurd and immoral behavior. What truth there might have been in the old religions was corrupted by the demons.

THE PROPHETS

By his own testimony we know that Justin’s conversion was in large part due to the Old Testament prophecies. Chapters XXI to LIII of the *First Apology* are an exposition of the ancient prophecies. Justin believes that the fulfillment of the prophecies in the life of Christ are sufficient proof for those who understand them. Justin’s method is similar to that of Christ Himself, who, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets . . . explained to them what was written in the Scriptures about Himself” (Luke 24:27). Justin begins with Moses, who foretells that that the “scepter will not depart from Judah ... until He comes for whom it is reserved....” As prophesied by Zephaniah, Jesus entered Jerusalem on the foal of an ass. “And Isaiah another Prophet, foretelling the same things... ‘A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a flower shall spring from the root of Jesse’ – this Christ.” Isaiah foretold that “a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, and they shall say for his name, ‘God with us.’” The prophet Micah foretold that He would be born in Bethlehem. David spoke the words, “They shall piece my hands and feet,” but his did not happen to David. It was Jesus who stretched out his hands to be crucified. Though the Jews possessed the books of the prophets, they did not understand.

Justin insists that the Spirit of prophecy speaks predicting things that are to come to pass. Christ would ascend to His Father and sit at His right hand. The Gentiles would worship him. If we believe in the things predicted about Christ before they came to pass, “we must necessarily believe also that those things which are in like manner predicted, but as yet to come to pass shall certainly happen.” “Though we could bring forward many other prophecies, we forbear, judging these sufficient for the persuasion of those who have ears to hear and understand”



CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

In the final part of the *First Apology*, Justin takes his readers into the sacramental life of the Church, specifically the rites of baptism and eucharist.

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that which we teach and say is true, and undertake to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us to where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said: ‘Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.’ And this washing is called illumination because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understanding.”¹⁴



Here Justin clearly identifies being born again with baptism, and not simply with an act of faith.

Following his or her baptism, the newly baptized person receives communion for the first time. Again Justin affirms that the sacraments are more than symbols.

This food is called among us the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration and who is living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these, but in like manner as Jesus Christ, our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.¹⁵

Here Justin affirms that the bread wine of the eucharist are not simply symbols of his body and blood, but are in truth His true Body and true Blood. He also reveals the practice of the second-century Church. To

receive Holy Communion, the recipient must have the faith of the Church and must be living a truly Christian life. “Closed communion” is not a modern rule.

Immediately following his description of the baptismal rite and eucharist, Justin makes a most unique gift to Christian posterity. Although many may not know where it originates, it has been quoted many times. It is the description of the Sunday liturgy in the second-century Church. Although it was written for the world beyond the Church, Orthodox Christians will find themselves very much at home in his description.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time allows; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs , and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and as we said before, when the prayer is ended bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons ... Sunday is the day we hold our common assembly because it is the first day of the week which God, having wrought a change in darkness and matters, and made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.¹⁶

THE SECOND APOLOGY

The *Second Apology*, which is considerably shorter than the first, is addressed to the Roman Senate. St. Justin condemns the Roman official Urbicus and other officials for the killing of Christians. These acts, he insists, are inspired by evil spirits. St. Justin gives an account of a Christian teacher, Ptolemaeus, who had instructed a woman wishing to leave her dissolute husband, who was condemned by Urbicus solely for being a Christian. He further charges the pseudo-philosopher Cresens for knowing nothing of the Christian faith while he incites the mob against Christians.

Justin attributes the cause of evil in the world to the demonic offspring of the angels who were captivated by the love of women (Genesis 6). These demons brought about all the evils in the world. *The purpose of the Incarnation was the destruction of demons.* This

somewhat unusual understanding of salvation is not unique to St. Justin. The intertestamental books of *Enoch* and *Jubilees* speak of the *Nephilim* as demons who remain on the earth to lead men astray. God does not destroy mankind because of the presence of faithful Christians. Despite the presence of demons in the world, each man retains his freedom of choice. In the end eternal punishment awaits the wicked. Justin concludes by asking that his “little book” be published, so that others may be freed from their “erroneous notions and ignorance of good.”


CONCLUSION

The Lord told his followers that if the world persecuted Him, it would also persecute them. If they hated Him, they would hate his followers. This persecution has come in the form of murdering Christians by totalitarian regimes, or by other means such as economic or social persecution. There will always be the need for prophetic voices who will condemn injustice toward the followers of Christ. Certainly St. Justin was such a man. He did not incite a mob to violence. He was, rather, a voice of reason who spoke the truth in his demand for justice. He made his voice heard in the most public of ways, addressing the Emperor, the Senate and the whole Roman people. He reminded his fellow Christians and us that our battle is beyond human depravity: it is with principalities and powers. He died for his convictions. It seems that our children are destined to live in a world increasingly hostile to Christianity. They do not need critics of the shortcomings of their local parish. They need parents who are apologists for our faith. We may not be defenders in quite the public arena as was Justin, but we certainly can be willing to defend our faith in the presence of our children and friends.

Fr. Dan Daly

Father Daniel is a retired Antiochian priest attached to St. Elias Church Austin, Texas. He was the unnamed author of the article on St. John of the Ladder in the June issue of The WORD.

1. Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1988), p. 53. For those interested in the defense of the faith in the apostolic period, Grant’s book is a good source.
2. Chapter 2 in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, edited by Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 195.
3. Ibid., p. 199.
4. *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs, Justin (and companions)*, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 305–306.
5. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 1.
6. Ibid., p. 164.
7. Ibid., p. 163.
8. Ibid.
9. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 1–2.
10. See Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chapters V and VI.
11. Psalm 95.
12. *First Apology*, Chapter X.
13. *First Apology*, Chapter XVII.
14. Ibid., Chapter LXI.
15. Ibid., Chapter LXVI.
16. Ibid., Chapter LXVII.



CREATING A “DYNAMIC MARRIAGE”

Fr. Aaron Warwick

An organization called Marriage Dynamics Institute, a non-profit, multi-denominational ministry, offers a course called “Dynamic Marriage,” in which over fifty thousand couples nationwide have participated. To my knowledge, however, our parish of St. Mary in Wichita, Kansas, became the first Orthodox parish to offer this course, in 2012. Since that time, my wife and I have facilitated a total of six courses, with 48 couples completing the program. While the majority of participating couples came from our own Orthodox community in Wichita, more than a dozen of the couples came from outside the Church and received their first exposure to Orthodoxy through this transformative ministry. A few of them have since joined the Orthodox Church. Two other parishes in our Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America just recently began offering Dynamic Marriage courses as well, and the program has been met with great enthusiasm there, too.

The Dynamic Marriage course is easy for any parish to offer. All that is needed to begin is for a couple to undergo one of Marriage Dynamics’ bi-monthly, three-day, weekend training sessions. At our parish, my wife and I decided to do the training. Many churches, including the other two I mentioned from our diocese, have laypeople trained to facilitate the course. This three-day weekend itself did more to help my wife and I improve our marriage than any previous marital counseling.

The focus of the training is to teach couples how to facilitate the Dynamic Marriage course. This term facilitate is key. The trained couple never teaches the course, but merely facilitates. The course is presented through books and workbooks designed by (Christian) trained professionals. In addition, teaching occurs through interaction among the couples themselves, as well as with a

group of six to twelve couples taking the course together. During this three-day training weekend, couples essentially go through a condensed version of the entire eight-week course they will facilitate, highlighting some of the key lessons and focusing on creating a safe, affirming environment for all couples in the course.

Those who are trained are also taught how to identify couples who should not take the course. Marriage Dynamics Institute offers specialized courses led by trained professionals to help marriages “in crisis.” While most married couples in our parish will thrive in the Dynamic Marriage course, those who are quickly headed for divorce need more personalized, professional assistance.

Once a couple is trained to facilitate the Dynamic Marriage course, they return to their parish and work with the clergy to promote the course. Each Dynamic Marriage course runs for eight weeks and requires a minimum of six couples, with twelve couples being the maximum number allowed. In addition to dealing with a few other topics, the main emphasis of the entire course is learning to identify and meet our spouse’s emotional needs. Each week during the program, with help from the textbook and accompanying workbooks, the couple works extensively on identifying their emotional needs and communicating them to their spouse. Each spouse in turn completes workbook assignments to help them develop strategies to meet their spouse’s needs.

In my pastoral marriage counseling, I have found almost all marital problems begin rather innocently, with each person trying to show love to their spouse the way they wish to receive it. So while the husband is trying to show love to his wife, his wife does not perceive his actions that way. The Dynamic Marriage course helps couples overcome this problem. The husband learns exactly how the wife likes to be shown love, and vice versa. Most couples who take the course end up finding it relatively easy to show love to their spouse once they find out how best to do it. Furthermore,

couples who may have questioned how much their spouse loved them quickly see their spouse cares about them more than they ever imagined. Once your spouse learns to show love in a meaningful way, it becomes clear just how much he or she loves you!

The final component of the Dynamic Marriage course I wish to highlight is the group dynamic. Understandably, this can be a scary aspect of the course, and we have found a few couples who avoid the class altogether because of this concern. While we recognize the Dynamic Marriage program is not for everyone, couples who “graduate” from the program find this component to be one of the most beneficial. Each week the couples meet in a group for about two hours. The meetings are centered around each person answering four questions, all of which they know and prepare for in advance. No one is pressured to share more than they feel comfortable sharing, and facilitators are trained to stop a person if they begin speaking negatively about their spouse (something my wife and I have not had to do in any of the courses we have led). While the questions are not invasive, they are all personal. That is, they are not about the marriage or about your spouse, but focus on what you are doing to become a better spouse, what you learned during the week, or how you can improve to help your marriage. In this sense, the course resonates with us as Orthodox



Christians who realize we cannot “make excuses in sin,” or blame others for our faults in our marriage. Instead, we must focus on improving ourselves and learn to overcome our selfish thinking and desires in order to live for our spouse. In this way, the course helps us live out the martyrs’ crowns we wear at our wedding!

The group aspect of the course is structured to provide support from peers. In addition to providing dozens of opportunities to affirm one another, the group component helps couples realize that they are not alone in their pursuit of a godly marriage. And we quickly realize that we are not the only ones who struggle to achieve such a lofty goal! Many Dynamic Marriage graduates have shared with us that while the homework assignments and discussions with each other at home were of great value, the group component was the most valuable aspect of the course. This should come as no surprise to us as Orthodox Christians since we understand the value of community life, as opposed to the limitations and pitfalls of individualism.

We live in a world where more pressure exists on marriages than perhaps ever in history. As a church community, we seek to provide real pastoral care for marriages and family. It is not enough for us to counsel people to “stay together” just for the sake of staying married. We should be training couples to help them reflect the love Christ has for the Church, as we read in the wedding Epistle lesson.

My hope is that you, clergy and laity throughout our Archdiocese, will research the program and consider being trained to facilitate a course in your local parish. Please do not hesitate to contact me at stmarywichita@cox.net if you have questions about the Dynamic Marriage program. In addition to my own testimony, I have dozens of parishioners who would love to share about their experience with the course. What I have learned has made me a better husband and a better priest. I hope many others throughout our Archdiocese will also benefit from this program and experience “dynamic marriages.”

Fr. Aaron Warwick, Pastor
St. Mary Church, Wichita, Kansas



GRIEF IS A FUNNY THING

Gregory Abdalah

Recently I took my wife to see *Les Misérables*. From the first time I heard the music, this had been one of my favorite musicals. I did not really understand all of the themes and topics at first, often turning to my mom for explanation as we were listening in the car. When asked to choose something to sing in an eighth-grade music class, I naturally chose my favorite song: “Stars.” My mother cried, of course. “Stars” became my go-to piece for anytime I needed something to sing – from high-school musical auditions to a “Broadway Night” performance in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, to my parents “requesting” that I sing for their friends during dinner in the Pope room at Buca di Beppo. My mother cried each time, of course. It became a running joke. I’d sing a few bars in the car, and then stop and ask, “You crying, ma?” Nothing seemed a more fitting encore when choosing the program for my college senior recital, the final for a degree in vocal performance. And for those who are wondering...yes, my mom cried. So, much to my surprise, when I took my wife to see *Les Misérables*, I got emotional during “Stars.” Then memories of the joy shared through music flooded in: listening together in the car, singing in the choir, seeing concerts and musicals and plays together. The next thing I knew, the cast started singing the reprise of “Do you hear the people sing?” and I could not stop crying. I even had to stay in my seat during the standing ovation to compose myself!

It hit me like a ton of bricks: Grief is a funny thing. It has the ability to creep up on you when you least expect it. While I was sharing this experience with a friend, he asked, “Does it feel fresh?”

I stumbled to find an answer and could not. The best I could come up with was, “It’s like a scab that sometimes gets picked off.” The reality is that it has been ten years since my mom passed away. I feel like I should be past the point of crying at random, but every so often that scab gets picked off. What does it really mean to be “past” it, anyway? I am not depressed, I am not wallowing in sadness, but I do miss my mom. I do not think that is a bad thing or something to be ashamed to admit. At the same time, I often feel funny when I talk about it, even with my wife, as though I should not feel this way. As though I’m less of a man if I get sad. We’re taught from a young age to “keep our chin up” and to not show any sign of weakness. The implication is that any show of emotion is weakness. This lends itself to the idea that we need simply to “move on” and “get over it.” This idea, taken to extremes, threatens to turn us into hardened stoics, unable to feel. On the flip side, I feel awkward posting drawn out, emotional rants on social media sites, worried that others would see these things as empty cries for attention which threaten to stagnate a healthy process of healing. The result is an internal conflict: a struggle to find normalcy, holding together a need to move on with open grief.

Grief is a funny thing. Not, of course, an amusing thing, but a weird feeling that can knock our legs out from under us when we least expect it. How do we begin to “deal”? To find “normalcy”? To begin, I think we have to recognize that in situations of grief, there is no “normal.” Grief is an expression of loss, and loss is a recognition that our community has changed. We are built for community and, one hopes, we grow through our experience of community. A shifting of that community, most especially when that shift occurs within our family, may require that we relearn how to function as a community. It may require that we step outside of what

is comfortable, into something new, and unknown, and even scary. When we step outside of our comfort zones, however, we learn.

This specific type of learning often comes through experiences in our lives that are difficult. For example, perhaps the most important lesson my mother ever taught me came in the months leading up to her death. In the May 2008 issue of *The WORD* magazine, the same month as she passed away, she wrote “I ask God to reveal His will for me.” How powerful a statement, mirroring Christ’s own prayer in the Garden of Gethsamane prior to His voluntary and life-giving death.¹ As we follow Christ’s way, we grow along His path. At St. George in Phoenix, we call this “The Way of the Warrior Saint”: a life that is practical, biblical, and crucifixional, focused on sacrificing our own needs for the needs of others. Moments of self-offering often manifest themselves through some form of self-denial. Ill-equipped to deal with suffering in our lives, these moments teach us, little by little, how to handle suffering so that when it comes, we might be ready.

During the Paschal season, we sing, “Make a joyful noise to God all the Earth,”² as a verse to the First Antiphon at Divine Liturgy. I often think of my mother when I hear this. Even in her greatest suffering, she gave praise to God. She wrote me an email of encouragement as I was finishing seminary, reminding me to pray each morning to put my mind at ease. She shared with me the Prayer of St. Philaret of Moscow, which ends, “Direct my will. Teach me to pray. Pray yourself in me.” My dad related once that in her final weeks, mom was agitated and uncomfortable for a few days and then was completely peaceful. She put her mind at ease, submitted her will to God’s, and her death was “painless, blameless, and peaceful.” In His moment of suffering, Christ models a response to the suffering in our lives, which my mother passed on to me in her suffering. Though this lesson is difficult to take, it is through learning that we grow.

Gregory Abdalah, D.Min., Pastoral Assistant
St. George Church, Phoenix, Arizona

1. Matthew 26:36–44.

2. Psalm 66:1.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS

COX, Peter, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop JOHN on August 10, 2018, at St. Peter Church, Fort Worth, Texas, during the Western Rite Conference.

FALCONE, Deacon Jason, to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL on August 26, 2018, at St. Luke Church, Erie, Colorado. He is assigned to that parish.

JOHNSON, Martin, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on August 5, 2018, at St. Elias Church, New Castle, Pennsylvania. He is assigned to St. Anthony Church, Butler, Pennsylvania.

PHILLIPS, Dom and Hierodeacon Theodore, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop JOHN on August 8, 2018, at St. Peter Church, Fort Worth, Texas, during the Western Rite Conference.

ROSELAND, Ephraim, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on August 12, 2018, at the Church of St. Basil the Great, Kansas City, Kansas. He is assigned to that parish.

FR. NICOLA YANNEY: THE FIRST PRIEST ORDAINED BY THE FIRST BISHOP

Amy Hadley



For many of the scattered Syrian Orthodox flock in America during the early Twentieth Century, being without a shepherd to guide them was especially bitter. A life bereft of the sacraments and of a spiritual guide was not what they had pictured when they set off for the golden shores of the United States. There were, however, those few who faithfully endured through extreme hardship and even answered the sacred call to become a shepherd. One of those pious men was Nicola Yanney.

Nicola Elias Yanney was born to Elias and Catherine Yanney on February 5, 1873 (Julian Calendar), in the small village of Fi'eh al-Koura in what is today northern Lebanon. During his youth, Nicola learned about Orthodoxy and also how to read and write at Deir al-Balamand (the Monastery of Balamand). As he walked to the Monastery he also passed through the village home of Martha George Al-Baik, the woman who would become his wife. Martha was the daughter of Nicola's uncle, and the two had been promised to each other by their families.

On November 8, 1892, Nicola Yanney married Martha. Nicola realized that in order to provide for his family, he would have to leave the only home that he and Martha had ever known. Turkish oppression and a collapsing economy had crippled the area. Having known others who had completed the arduous journey to America, Nicola decided that the best option would be for both him and Martha to travel there together. Trusting God, they set foot on the steamer that would carry them away from al-Koura, never again to return.

Following a long voyage and the immigration process, they took up residence at 12th and William Streets in the “Syrian” section of Omaha, Nebraska.



Yanney family 1897

In order to pay off debts and to be able to help their families back home, Nicola immediately went to work as a peddler. While peddling was considered a lower-class vocation in their homeland, the Syrians readily embraced the trade when they arrived in the United States. Peddling enabled the new immigrants to be employed while requiring little initial capital investment. Traveling extensively throughout the region, they learned much about their new homeland while making important business and social connections. Peddling door-to-door also allowed the new immi-

grants to learn the English language and American culture more quickly.

While peddling was an easy trade for Nicola to take up, the travel demands were steep. He and Martha wanted other work as soon as possible. While Nicola was gradually picking up the English language, Martha was not. She felt very isolated and alone when Nicola was absent. This desire for change became even more intense when Martha became pregnant with their first child.

Three days after their first wedding anniversary, Nicola and Martha welcomed their son, Elias Nicola, into the world. Nicola continued peddling while he sought a new location in which to raise his growing family. By this time, Martha was pregnant once again, and they knew they wanted to get out of the city and back to their roots in farming. Nicola was then encouraged by a friend to move two hundred miles west of Omaha to the town of Kearney.

Mike Hayek, a fellow villager from Fi'eh who had also started out in the same peddling company, had made his way to central Nebraska. Nicola visited the area, found a homestead to rent, and the decision was made. After Martha gave birth to their daughter, Anna, in July of 1895, the family once again packed up for another destination. This time, their home would be a two-room sod house in Buckeye Valley, approximately twenty miles northeast of Kearney.

Not long after the family had settled in central Nebraska, Nicola sent for his youngest brother, George Yanney, from Canada. George had been alone for three years following an accidental separation from their brother John on their way to New York. To Nicola's delight, George agreed to come and join them. They were elated to be reunited with family, but Nicola and Martha still longed for an Orthodox church in which to raise their family. Not since they had left their homeland had they been able to immerse themselves in the daily life of the Church.

On the Feast of the Ascension, 1897, the Yanneys' third child, John Nicola, was born on the Yanney homestead. Not long after John's birth, a small Syrian community began to form in central Nebraska. Friends from Fi'eh began to come to America and follow in the footsteps of Nicola and Martha. Nicola's best friend from Fi'eh, John Shada, and his brothers had returned to America with their wives and children.

Even without a church home, this growing flock of Syrians began to come together to celebrate holy days. Nicola especially understood the immense difficulty



The Yanney family, circa 1901. Left to right: Elias, Nicola, Moses, John, Martha, Anna.

of holding firm to Orthodoxy when no churches or priests were available. These organic gatherings of like-minded Syrians were a welcome relief from years of drought, but they did not completely fill the hearts of the pious Syrians who longed for the sacraments.

Nicola's friend John Shada, who was still living in Omaha, gave news that a Syrian Orthodox priest had recently visited the city. Nicola and Martha had heard rumors about this priest. To know he actually existed gladdened their weary hearts, but they doubted they would be able to journey to Omaha if he came a second time. They had a spark of hope to cling to, but the two hundred miles to Omaha might as well have been a thousand. Taking a secondhand Arabic Bible that he had purchased, Nicola decided to begin recording events and studying the Holy Scriptures more fervently. If a priest would not come to them, at least he still had the ability to read the Scriptures. On one of the front pages he wrote:

In God's name and with His grace, this record is written by His poor servant who longs for His powerful Lord, Nicola Elias Yanney from the Orthodox village of Fi'eh, resident of Buffalo County, Nebraska, United States of America.

Whoever reads this record and finds any mistake in it, please correct it in God's name, and God will correct his life in this world and in the life to come because no one is perfect except God, who has no mistakes.

Nicola, George, and Martha continued to work hard, cultivating the land and providing for the family. In the summer of 1899, baby Moses Nicola was born, the fourth child of the Yanney family. A few months following the birth, the family was rather startled by a surprise visit. In the middle of the night, the sounds of gunfire punctured the tranquility of the homestead. After racing outside, Nicola realized that there was a raucous group of men approaching their home, and they were calling to him in Arabic.

Over a dozen people, yelling excitedly and shooting pistols into the air greeted Nicola, Martha, and George. In their midst stood the dignified Syrian priest the Yanneys had so desperately wanted to meet, Archimandrite Raphael Hawaweeny. Unbeknownst to Nicola, one of the reasons for this cross-country visit was to find pious men who might be ordained to be able to serve the Orthodox Syrians scattered across this part of the country. This September midnight meeting would radically change the course of Nicola's life.

“But a hireling, *he who* is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep” (John 10: 12–13).

The Yanney family continued to add to their members, with Simon Yanney, Nicola's eldest brother, joining them on the homestead. In the winter of 1902, however, great tragedy also struck. As the family prepared for the birth of their fifth child, Martha became gravely ill. Giving birth too soon, she fell unconscious and never awoke. To Nicola's great sorrow, there was no priest available to serve Martha communion before her death or to serve at her funeral. To offer what they could, the Orthodox community joined together to give condolences and to help.

The baby girl was premature and weak. Nicola watched helplessly as her life faded and her condition grew worse. In the absence of a priest, Nicola prayed fervently over his daughter, naming her Nour. He anointed her with water to baptize her, having seen the rite many times. Nour's was his first baptism. The family only had nine precious days with Nour before she

too passed away. The family Bible was once again used to record events; this time, full of sorrow and grief:

Our uncle’s daughter Martha passed away on Monday morning at ten o’clock on February 11th, 1902. She was buried on Tuesday in an Irish cemetery in the state of Nebraska...Our baby daughter Nour passed away on Wednesday morning, February 20th, 1902.

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own” (John 10:14).

Only twenty-nine years old, Nicola was now a widower responsible for four young children, devoid of an Orthodox church, and a world away from his homeland. Even with his brothers there to console him, the grief was such a burden. It was, in fact, a stark reminder for the whole Syrian community of their dire need for an Orthodox church and for a priest. They agreed that they would contact Father Raphael and plead boldly for his help.

Father Raphael agreed to make their community his fifth official church if they could provide a priest’s salary and procure a church building. These conditions would be difficult to meet for the small com-



Father Nicola Yanney with his sons Elias, Moses, and John, circa 1908.

munity, but they would prove their commitment. Another problem still loomed, however. Including Father Raphael, only four Syrian Orthodox priests served the entire continent of North America. Father Raphael instructed the Kearney community to choose from among themselves one who was worthy of ordination.

The church building was the first condition to be fulfilled. A recently closed school building a few miles outside of Kearney would fit their needs nicely, once it had been moved into town. On Pascha, the entire Syrian community met at John Shada’s home to celebrate the holiest day of the year. During this meeting, the news of Father Raphael’s message and the school building were excitedly announced. That very evening a collection was taken, and they raised one hundred twenty-five dollars, enough to purchase their soon-to-be church building.

As for the most difficult condition to fulfill, the Syrian community was also quick to come to a consensus for a priesthood candidate: Nicola Yanney. Many of the Syrians had grown up with him in Fi’eh. He knew more about Orthodoxy than anyone else in the community, having been tutored by monks. Even though he wrestled with grief over the recent loss of his wife and child, he still possessed an unfailing devotion to God. The people knew Nicola and trusted him to guide them. If Nicola accepted ordination, however, he would never be able to remarry. His children would never again have a mother.

After much prayer and careful consideration, Nicola accepted the community’s request. Father Raphael was unable to come to Kearney to thoroughly examine Nicola, but he instead sent Archimandrite Meletios Karroum. Archimandrite Meletios recommended the young widower be ordained with the condition that he give up the family farm and move to town. The necessary examinations were complete, and Nicola and the community waited for news from Father Raphael.

In the meantime, the school building was successfully purchased. Throughout the fall and winter, the community met in the small building which was slowly being remodeled into a church. Finally as spring drew near, a message was sent to Kearney with the news that Nicola was to be ordained near the end of Lent! The Syrian community rejoiced with the joyous news about Nicola and that he was to be ordained by Father Raphael himself. Not only that, but Father Raphael was soon to be consecrated as their bishop; he would be the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in the entire western hemisphere. They had patiently



الخوري نقولاني

The Gospel Book in Father Nicola’s hand was a gift given to him by his parishioners in Kearney in the year 1909. It remains in St. George Orthodox Church in Kearney, Nebraska to this day. The Arabic script above is Father Nicola’s signature: “al-Khoury Nicola Yanney.”

waited for months, and then everything seemed jump into motion.

Nicola left for New York, and he left his children in the care of his two brothers. There were several ranks through which Nicola had to pass in order to be ordained a priest – reader, subdeacon, deacon – and the process took two weeks. Finally, during the Palm Sunday Liturgy of April 3, 1904, the Reverend Nicola Yanney became the first priest to be ordained by the first bishop consecrated in the New World. The priestly vestments given to Father Nicola at his ordination were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II, as was an engraved gold pocket watch. After his ordination, Father Nicola remained in New York at St. Nicholas Cathedral to complete his priestly training for a few weeks before returning home to Kearney.

“And other sheep I have which are not of this

fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd” (John 10: 16).

Bishop RAPHAEL entrusted his new priest with a massive missionary territory. For not only was Father Nicola assigned to pastor the newly formed St. George Orthodox Church in his hometown, he was also given the task of pastoring all of the Syrian Orthodox in the central United States who were also without a priest. Father Nicola’s missionary territory extended from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Rocky Mountains to east of the Mississippi River – a daunting mandate, indeed.

On his return to Kearney from New York, Father Nicola began serving weekly services. He trained Elias and several other boys to participate as altar servers. Overjoyed to finally have a church and priest, the

Author Amy and husband, Levi, have two children, Micah and Alexis. Amy teaches Sunday School at St. George and teaches Sixth Grade English at Sunrise Middle School in Kearney.

Syrians poured into the church, eager to worship in their own language and to partake of the sacraments. Several weeks later, George was married to Rebecca, a member of the Shada family. Father Nicola was honored to be able to serve in their wedding ceremony before once again leaving on another missionary journey.

Leaving his young children in the care of George and his new wife, Rebecca, Father Nicola left his home for up to six months at a time, traveling to small communities of Orthodox faithful living in nineteen different states. For the next few years, Father Nicola faithfully shepherded his missionary territory, but he also worried about his family and church family when he was gone.

Typhoid fever swept through central Nebraska, taking the lives of four church members. Father Nicola's daughter Anna had also been suffering from a heart condition, and there was seemingly nothing doc-

Yanney passed away from chronic heart problems. Father Nicola had arrived after she had already fallen unconscious, and he was unable to tell her goodbye. To lose yet another child was intensely heartbreaking, but Father Nicola's faithfulness to God and to his flock burned bright. In mid-June, shortly after serving Anna's funeral on June 8, Father Nicola again left Kearney to continue his missionary travel.

The next several years were brimming with missionary visits, marriages, funerals, baptisms, chrismations, and the daily responsibilities of a parish priest and father. According to Father Nicola's available sacramental records, he served in 910 baptisms, 106 marriages, 30 funerals, and 10 chrismations. These were during the course of at least 422 pastoral visits that Father Nicola made to the flocks within his missionary territory. Sadly, the year 1918 is not included in this count. The sacramental records had not yet been transferred to the permanent record book, and his original sacramental notes have not yet been uncovered.

Also during this time period, in 1915, the beloved Bishop RAPHAEL reposed, leaving the Syrians in America with a feeling of uncertainty about the future. Bishop RAPHAEL had been a shining beacon for the Syrian Orthodox faithful, and his death was a heavy blow. Father Nicola, however, continued the missionary tasks that Bishop RAPHAEL had entrusted to him, giving sacrificially and lovingly to everyone in his care.

"As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15).

In October of 1918, as the Spanish Flu epidemic raged through Kearney, Father Nicola faithfully ministered to his parishioners. Like other states during the epidemic, Nebraska enacted a quarantine, forcing all public gathering places, including churches, to close. Father Nicola brought the Holy Mysteries to the sick and suffering in their homes even though he too was suffering from the sickness. Father Nicola continued ministering to his parishioners up until just hours before his own death.

Gathered to his bedside, his children received their

father's last words: "Keep your hands and your heart clean." Father Nicola commended his soul to God at forty-five years of age, a faithful and devoted servant of God until the very last breath.

His newspaper obituary reads, "Rev. N. E. Yanney Is Victim of the Flu: Syrian Pastor Worked With His Parish Members to Last." The obituary continues: "During the past week Rev. Yanney worked faithfully among his parish members here, many of them being stricken with the influenza. Considerable exposure to the disease was inevitable and although he had complained of not being in the best of health he continued his work uninterrupted until the last."

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10: 17-18).

Following the example of Jesus and of Bishop RAPHAEL, Father Nicola Yanney laid down his life in serving and nurturing the scattered flocks entrusted to his care. His unwavering devotion and sacrifice will forever be a holy example, worthy of emulation.

Amy Hadley
St. George Church, Kearney, Nebraska



Father Nicola's funeral on November 4, 1918. From left to right: Father John Saba, Father Elias Sady, Metropolitan Germanos. Standing: sons John and Moses Yanney; nephew Michael M. Yanney. Seated: son Elias Yanney and brother George Yanney.

tors could do for her. George and Rebecca had been blessed with a son they named John Elias George Yanney. Father Nicola was able to baptize the child, and returned to his missionary journeys. Tragically, John Elias became ill and passed away, leaving the family devastated.

On June 4, 1907, Father Nicola was once again called home from his missionary journeys because his daughter, Anna, was sicker than she had ever been. On June 7, six months shy of her twelfth birthday, Anna

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

The Antiochian Heritage Foundation 2018-2019 Legacy Project



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Young Professionals’ Third Conference –



Their Largest Yet.

Whether working in big corporations, or trying to navigate the post-collegiate world, young professionals regularly suffer loneliness for many reasons. No one was lonely, however, at the third biennial Orthodox Young Professionals Conference,¹ as a record-setting 200 participants gathered and dwelt in unity with their Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Mark 10:45 (“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”) served as the theme of the OYPC, sponsored by the Antiochian Archdiocese’s Young

Adult Ministry², August 16–19, 2018, in Denver, Colorado. In his letter to the attendees, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH challenged them “to give back, rather than to take, be it through your time or talents,” as their parents have done. Sayidna JOSEPH urged them not to think of their faith and work lives as separate entities, but to let the former influence the latter, and to remember that they are the *present* of the Church.

Serving as the keynote speaker and celebrant of the OYPC’s divine services, Rev. Milad Selim, Dean of St.

George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Worcester, Massachusetts, tackled “The Hidden Sin of Loneliness.” Sometimes, the choices people make alienate them from the community, while sometimes it is things that others do to them, Fr. Milad taught. Embarrassment, shame and rejection – and even the fear of them – take people away from the love of Christ and His Church. Serving and praying for others, along with repentance and forgiveness, properly fills the void of loneliness.

Workshop speaker Katrina Bitar, North America program director of YES (Youth Empowered to Serve), stressed that emptiness can only be filled by being Christ to others and serving them – on the streets, at work, and everywhere. She taught the young professionals not to fear rejection, judgment, harm and vulnerability. “The things that make us angry are not what God intended for the world,” Katrina said, “so do something to heal them.” She also urged attendees to

Spiritual nourishment and divine services during the daytime were complimented by exciting fellowship opportunities at night. They included a welcome reception in downtown Denver, a fun evening at the beautiful Red Rock Amphitheater, and dinner and dancing Saturday night with a group photo. With a schedule allowing free time in the afternoon, attendees were able to connect and network with each other as they toured the city and its famous sites.

On Sunday morning, the attendees took buses to St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church in nearby Arvada for Orthros and Divine Liturgy, where the pastor, V. Rev. George Shawarab, and the entire community warmly welcomed them. After the beautiful services, many of the attendees stayed for lunch at their Middle Eastern festival. OYPC was grateful to St. Elias and St. Herman of Alaska Church (OCA) in Littleton for loaning to the conference icons, a gospel book, candles and a censer for divine services at the hotel.

The conference would not be possible without the help of the many committee members and the financial support of sponsors. Special thanks go to the Antiochian Archdiocese, the Kulis Foundation, Charles and Marilee Ajalat, Fadi G. Madanat, Jamil Malone, St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church of Irvine, California, Peter



pray about their service, so they know it is God’s will and not their own, and to be teachable so that they can learn from the knowledge of others.

Another workshop speaker, Protodeacon Peter Danilchick, former Exxon Mobil Corporation executive and current trustee of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, focused his teaching on “servant leadership.” In this concept, Protodeacon Peter told the attendees to brace themselves for rejection, because Christ Himself was rejected. Yet, as leaders, we are to serve at the same time, and give care and compassion no matter what rank – bosses or coworkers. He added that servant leaders actively listen to those around them, and desire no individual credit for success. After all, “He is who great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23:11).

Mustian, Archdeacon Saed Rihani and Hani Abughazaleh, for their generosity.

The OYPC is most grateful for Fr. Milad, Protodeacon Peter, and Katrina, for sacrificing their time, energy and expertise to ensure a successful and inspiring conference. The attendees were also thankful for the efforts of the committee members, especially co-chairpersons Kyra Pelachik, Fadi G. Madanat, and Irene Papas for making possible a memorable weekend. They all look forward to reuniting at next July’s Archdiocesan Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The next OYPC will be in August of 2020, and possibly there will be a young adult retreat in Boston in the fall of 2019. This would be at the invitation of Fr. Milad, who said that he had made 200 new friends.

1. Find us on the Web at <https://www.oypc.org/> and follow us on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/oypc2018/>
2. Go to <http://ww1.antiochian.org/youngadult> and follow on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Antiochian-YoungAdultMinistry/>

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

MIDWEST DIOCESE BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

St. George Church, Canton, Ohio, hosted the Twentieth An-



nual Midwest Diocese Basketball Tournament, January 19–21, 2018. Canton's Teen SOYO initiated the tournament twenty years ago, and it has grown over the years to become a mini-convention, drawing youth from around the Diocese. His Grace Bishop ANTHONY presided over the weekend, ordaining Anthony Westerman of Louisville, Kentucky, a deacon during Sunday's Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. On behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Bishop ANTHONY also presented the Archdiocese Meritorious Service Award to Mrs. Sadie Kannam of Canton. Deacon Anthony presented a retreat on Friday evening titled "The Armor of God," tying in his own personal experience as a U.S. Marine. He is now looking forward to becoming a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. On Saturday, basketball games were held among three divisions, with great excitement, cheers, and encouragement. Following Great Vespers on Saturday evening, Canton SOYO President Mareena Michael welcomed everyone to the Awards Banquet and Hafli, capping a beautiful day of great sportsmanship and fellowship. Serving with His Grace Bishop ANTHONY on Sunday were Fr. Michael Corbin and Fr. Basil Shaheen of St. George, Canton, along with the Midwest SOYO Spiritual Advisor Fr. Michael Sakran of St. John, Ft. Wayne, and Dn. Joseph Olas of St. George, Indianapolis. This historic and exciting weekend ended with a beautiful farewell luncheon! A special thanks is owed to longtime Tournament Chair Nick Michael, Sub-deacon Dr. K. J. Shaheen, and all the wonderful volunteers at St.

George. We look forward to hosting you again next year in Canton, so mark January 18–20, 2019 on your calendar!

The winners of this year's tournament are as follows:

- Division I (Ages 12–15)
 1. St. George, Akron, OH
 2. St. George, Canton, OH
 3. St. George, Flint, MI
- Division II (Ages 15–18)
 1. St. Matthew, North Royalton, OH
 2. St. John, Fort Wayne, IN
 3. St. George, Flint, MI
- Division III (Ages 19–26)
 1. St. George, Akron, OH
 2. St. Mary, Palos Hts., IL
 3. St. Mark, Youngstown, OH

MIRACULOUS WEEPING ICON VISITS ST. ANTHONY, NEW JERSEY

Some call it a miracle, others say it is a testament to true faith. Those are among the reactions from people who have been anointed by the Theotokos Kardiotissa, or "Tender Heart" icon of the Virgin Mary, which streams fragrant, healing myrrh.

The icon has visited many parishes across the country. On May 25, 2018, St. Anthony Orthodox Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey hosted the Kardiotissa. It was a hot and humid Friday night, and the start of a long holiday weekend. Organizers of the event worried about the timing of the event. The turnout was far greater than anyone could have expected. Orthodox faithful came from miles away, joined by people from the community of many religions, who had heard about the myrrh-bearing icon.

One parishioner, who had parked blocks away and was walk-

heard of the famous Icon of 'Our Lady of Tender Heart,' but never



ing to the church, was stopped by a homeowner who was wondering what was drawing the crowds. The parishioner told him about the event and invited his family to join them. The homeowner ended up bringing many of his neighbors.

Father Mark Leisure is the Pastor of St. George Orthodox Church in Taylor, Pennsylvania, the icon's home parish. He told its story to an audience that stood in line, in some cases for more than an hour, and answered questions

The Kardiotissa has been linked to some awe-inspiring miracles. One man says it helped him recover from heart disease. A woman claimed that it cured her cancer. A prominent oncologist now suggests his patients visit the Kardiotissa, as part of their treatment.

All agree, it was a night to remember. St. Anthony's Pastor, V. Rev. Fr. Joseph Allen said, "I had

thought we could bring it into St Anthony's. I knew it would be felt by our community, but I never expected just how strong would be its impact. Now we pray that that same 'force of grace' – precisely that impact – will continue to abide in the heart of our life with each other!" Fr. Michael Ibrahim, Assistant Pastor, added, "All that I can say is this: I felt it was Heaven on earth."

BISHOP ANTHONY BLESSES ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST'S PROPERTY

On the evening of Tuesday, May 29, His Grace Bishop ANTHONY blessed the six-acre property of St. Luke the Evangelist, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, in preparation for the parish's building construction project. Approximately sixty parish members, friends, and benefactor participated in the service. In addition to the faithful present, twelve priests and one deacon assisted His Grace with the service. The clergy represented eight Orthodox parishes from six jurisdictions in the region.

The blessings service began with His Grace, accompanied by

the Rev. Fr. Matthew Thurman, pastor of St. Luke, and the other clergy, processing from the edge of the property to the building's future location on the property. His Grace, accompanied by Fr. Matthew, then censed the perimeter of the future church building. His Grace blessed a large wooden cross to mark the future location of the altar. Fr. Matthew and Fr. Daniel Rohan of St. Mark, Youngstown, assisted His Grace in planting the cross. After Bishop ANTHONY put the first shovelful of dirt into the base of the cross, he invited Fr. Matthew, Fr. Daniel, and each of the other priests in turn to add dirt to plant the cross. His Grace then blessed a flagstone with a golden cross painted on it, using blessed oil and holy water. The flagstone was then planted at the foot of the cross.

Finally, Bishop ANTHONY, accompanied by Fr. Matthew, blessed the perimeter of the future church building with holy water. The service concluded with everyone kneeling and His Grace offering the final blessing prayer for the property. After the dismissal, His Grace offered a few remarks on how now the building was essentially there and that it was now the responsibility of the parish to provide actual walls to complete the structure.

Afterwards, the celebration continued with a dinner hosted by Chicago Deli in Solon. Bishop ANTHONY spoke to the gathered faithful about this historic moment in the life of the St. Luke community, and encouraged the parish to complete the building project as soon as possible. Gifts in excess of \$2,600 were given towards the building fund at the dinner.



*Orthodox Committee
On Scouting Awards
College Scholarships*

Contact: Dr. Miriam E.
Kotsonis, Scholarship Chairman,
EOCS; mekotsonis@gmail.com;
908-672-0001

The Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting (EOCS) is pleased to announce that two scholarships of \$1,000 each have been awarded to Isaac Gabriel Abdalla and Helen Amelia McGinnis. They were selected from a nationwide group of highly qualified applicants who had received both the highest award of their Scout organization (Eagle or Gold, for Boy Scouts of America, and Girl Scouts of the USA, respectively) and the highest Orthodox Christian religious award, the Alpha Omega medal. Students were evaluated on how they demonstrated love of God and their Orthodox Christian faith through scholarship, leadership, service, and practical citizenship in their church, school, Scouting unit, and community.

Isaac Gabriel Abdalla is a communicant of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Charleston, West Virginia. He attended Capital High School, and his most recent Scout units are Troop 64 and Venturing Crew 64. Among his many distinctions are completion of every merit badge in the Boy Scout program, Brotherhood status in the Order of the Arrow, extensive community service, and a massive Eagle Scout project that resulted in over 12,000 food items being collected for a local food bank. He graduated in the top 3 percent of his class, has been very active in his parish, played varsity sports all his high school years, and both participated in state championship chess teams and led them. Isaac will attend West Virginia University this coming fall and plans to major in engineering.

Helen Amelia McGinnis is a communicant of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Charlotte, North Carolina. She attended South Mecklenburg High School, and her most recent Scout unit is Troop 1133. Her innovative Gold Award project dealt with concussion prevention, for which she produced and delivered a multi-media curriculum, later posting it on a website as an ongoing resource. She graduated in the top 2 percent of her large class as an AP Scholar with Honor, tutored ESL and mathematics classes, competed on swimming and cross-country teams, and was recognized for her leadership in her parish, community, and Scouting Service Unit. Helen will attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and plans to study computer science.

The EOCS is an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. Formed in 1960, it is tasked with coordinating the Orthodox Christian Scouting program in America and serving as the officially recognized representative of the Eastern Orthodox Church for both the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts nationally. Along with granting annual scholarships (56 since 1993), the EOCS publicizes Orthodox Christian Scouting, holds retreats, assists in the formation of troops, and offers three age-appropriate religious awards for Scouts. For more information about any of these topics, visit the EOCS website at www.eocs.org.



Make Some Memories at the Archdiocese Convention 2019



I remember the year: 1961; I remember the month: August. My father and I celebrated birthdays together, every summer. This particular year, we traveled to Youngstown, Ohio, to visit aunts, uncles, and cousins. Then we drove to the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese Convention at the William Penn Hotel in nearby Pittsburgh. We were not just my immediate family, but also aunts and uncles from Youngstown and Montreal. There I met for the first time, Metropolitan ANTONY, of thrice-blessed memory; Danny Thomas was the guest of honor. This was my first Archdiocese Convention, embedded in my memory.

My father, Abe Abraham, was a long-time member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. Every year, we traveled to a convention. In 1962 it was Asbury Park, New Jersey, along the Boardwalk and the Atlantic Ocean. Dad, mom, and I traveled by car and, once again, met the same relatives at the Convention, Nespo and Elsie Kaleel, and Mike and Nadia David and their children. In 1963, we visited Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, before going to Washington, D.C., for the Convention. There I met mom's good friend, Rachel Blair, of Canton, Ohio. She traveled to every convention, as we did. Memories.

The list of cities we toured is impressive: Toronto, Boston (we stopped at the World's Fair in New York City), San Francisco, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Miami (on which trip we had car engine problems and stayed overnight in Nashville). My sisters and I eagerly awaited our summer vacations to meet our friends from around the country. SOYO and Archdiocese Conventions were our generation's Antiochian Village, where we met and nurtured life-long friendships. More memories.

As I grew older, I became active in Teen SOYO and Senior SOYO, and served two different times on the Archdiocese Board. And I continued to attend Archdiocese Conventions in Boston, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Montreal, and Louisville, where I met some of my best friends along the way: George Frieje, Ron Nicola, Gary Younes, Rami Younes. Then I got married, and my wife Debbie and I traveled to the conventions together. We took a few years off as we started our family, and then we continued the Abraham family legacy of taking our children to conventions in Atlanta, Toronto, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Detroit, Montreal, Palm Springs. More memories again.

Now my children are taking a few years off to raise their children, but I pray that Grand Rapids will be the beginning of their new family summer vacation plans. St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is honored and proud to place its name alongside the churches and cities that have had the privilege of hosting an Archdiocese Convention.

As co-chair of Archdiocese Convention 2019, I invite you and your family to start your own tradition. Come and pray with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Learn more about our Orthodox faith. Understand the role the Archdiocese plays in each of our home parishes. Have fun with your new friends. Explore the beauty of Pure Michigan, whether you travel up north to breathtaking Mackinac Island, or to the nearby beaches of freshwater Lake Michigan. It all begins in Grand Rapids. "You'll Love It Here," because we love it here.

Alan Abraham

Judges Choice, the Oratorical Festival from the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America

Cassidy Lee Irwin



Cassidy Lee Irwin
St. Paul Church, Katy,
Texas

My little sister lit a candle, and venerated an icon. She seemed so old, but she’s only eight. In that moment, she entered into the life of the ancient church – young but old.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see the apostles spreading the Gospel throughout Jerusalem and, eventually, the whole world. In Israel, they baptize those they convert. After Peter preaches a sermon to the people of Israel, they ask him, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They hear the Gospel and then ask the apostles, How are we supposed to respond to this revelation? Peter says, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the Promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39). The people of Israel did exactly that: “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This is the incarnation of the Orthodox faith. St. John Chrysostom writes,

“And they continued,” it is written, “steadfastly in the doctrine (or, teaching) of the Apostles” [Acts 2:42]: for it was not for one day, no, nor for two or three days that they were under teaching as being persons who had gone over to a different course of life. [“And they continued with one accord in the Apostles’ doctrine,” etc.] The expression is not, ὁ ποῦ, “together,” but ὁ ποθουμᾶδὸν, “with one accord”; (and daily, he says [afterwards], they were continuing with one accord in the temple,) i.e., with one soul.¹

St. John acknowledges that the people who were baptized immediately began following in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. It did not take them a few days or a couple of weeks to start. They began at once. And they continued for the rest of their days. This is why someone my sister’s age can be baptized and immediately begin participating in the life of the church. The new believers lived lives in which they would always and forever continue in the Apostles’ doctrine. As St. John Chrysostom says, they did not continue for only a couple of days, but always.

In continuing the traditions of the Apostles, partaking of communion, and praying the same prayers that have been prayed for thousands of years, we keep the Apostolic Faith alive. My little sister prayed the timeless prayers and she entered into the fullness of the faith.

We maintain the steadfastness of the early church, for it is by this steadfastness that the church flourishes. Immediately following their continuance in the Apostles’ doctrine, “fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the Apostles” (Acts 2:43). This fear in the face of miracles is similar to the fear of the Lord. Only after the people of Israel have followed in the Apostles’ doctrine does fear befall the soul. Proverbs 9:10 states that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The fear of God and growth in Christ for the people of Israel is contingent upon continuing steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.

At my Orthodox school, the student body is composed of many different denominations. We read about the early Church Fathers and their writings. We discuss what the Church Fathers thought of the importance of tradition and the actual person of God, Jesus Christ. The effect this has on students who are not Orthodox is profound. Kids my age, including myself, who have never encountered a text like Gregory Palamas’ Triads find themselves grappling with the notions of the essence and energies of God. At first we were baffled. Who knew God had something called an energy? During these classes, it feels like we have been transported to another time. The dynamics in the room change and you know that what you are grasping for is a Truth only revealed to those who wish to seek it. I was frustrated that I couldn’t understand what St. Gregory was trying to say, but I knew that I could never fully understand without the context of a life in the church that was performing the same function and following the same doctrine that St. Gregory did. I need my church and our traditions to supply me with the setting for the discovery of the character of God. After a few hours of grueling conversations and a few arguments, class had ended but our conversation never did. Even kids who are not yet Orthodox are still reaching for the true meaning of the essence and energy of God. God is what we long for, and through our fellowship we reach the Apostles: students who incarnated doctrine in fellowship. The Apostles’ doctrine

and fellowship must be present in one’s everyday life. It must manifest itself in one’s character. And must be obvious to outsiders.

Friends approached me after class, asking about Orthodoxy, and if our Church was anything like the discussion we had just had. Yes. There is so much about Orthodoxy that is sacred, because it has been preserved in the steadfast continuance of the Apostles’ doctrine. We were searching for the fullness of the faith that St. Gregory had described. He had shown us that there was so much to the Christian faith that we had not been taught yet, and there is still so much that I don’t understand. Yet the Apostles, my parents, and my priest point to the pathway we should pursue. Tradition lives on in us as a voice for students and a generation seeking answers and growth. Just as Peter told the people of Israel, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord God will call.” He says to them that this faith is not just for them, but for everyone who is called by God. Therefore they must keep it alive. They must continue steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. They must enjoy the breaking of bread and prayers for the sake of future generations who will follow after them, seeking the fullness of a life in Christ. “Tradition is not a principle striving to restore the past, using the past as a criterion for the present. Such a conception of tradition is rejected by history itself and by the consciousness of the Orthodox Church. Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words. Tradition is a charismatic, not a historical event,” says Fr. George Florovsky. In order to live the fulness of the faith, we must be constantly and steadfastly following in the Apostles’ doctrine and

fellowship. Tradition would be lost without our connection to the Apostolic Fathers and their faith.

I volunteer in the elementary Sunday school classes at my parish. Here, the children participate in the “Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.” Catechesis engages the whole child – mind, body, and soul. The children walk into the class room, which is kept as a sacred and quiet space, much like a sanctuary, where they act out several holy traditions. They first gather around the teacher where they read a verse followed by personal meditation. Afterwards, they take turns sitting at a miniature altar, where they prepare the altar, light a candle, and pray in front an icon of Christ, creating an image of the preparation done before we take communion. The atmosphere in the room at this time is unlike anything I have ever experienced. It is silent, but filled with the fervent prayers of children. Witnessing this gave me hope for the future. I began to see that the children were not only learning how to worship God, but they were learning what it looked like to live the fullness of the faith. It requires utmost attention and practice. Some children struggled. But their classmates were there to help them, just as the church is here to help me. When we are part of the body of Christ, we are never alone. Children fellowshiped through learned doctrine. They broke bread. And they prayed. The Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship must be followed steadfastly in order for the fullness of the faith to be preserved for generations to come. Watching these children made that fact extremely clear for me. The light of Christ shone through them all throughout their class time. My sister lit a candle, revered an icon, and stood timelessly with the Apostles in the fullness of the faith. So may I, so may we all.

1. St. John Chrysostom, Homily 7 on the Acts of the Apostles, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/210107.htm>

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