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ur 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 phenomena 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 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 our selves 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 asceticism 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 to 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 Role of the Priest as Spiritual Father in the Orthodox Spiritual Life

Ep. THOMAS Joseph and Peter Schweitzer

As a way of life, rather than a religion, Orthodox 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 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...
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The spiritual priesthood must be the foundation of the sacred healing as well. The priest is properly and foundationally of orthodoxy is a therapeutic science which seeks the healing priesthood. The priest is not a functionary ordained to fatherhood, we must inquire as to the nature of the pastoral priest, and his ordination presupposes acqui- sition of the corresponding spiritual state. Metropoli- tan 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 philos- ophy. According to the patristic teachings it is the priest’s task to illuminate others, his or- dination presupposes that he has an illuminated nous, which, as we have seen, is a degree of theo- ria. Thus the priest must remember God unceas- ingly 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 ordi- nation of deacons, priests, and bishops takes is equally indicative of the spiritual condition which they are assumed to have reached in order to ful- fill these essential tasks. For how can people be helped if the guide has no personal experience of the task which they are to carry out?

This is daunting, I know. If we are not tending and filled with fear at the thought of our awesome re- sponsibility before God and His people, nothing can move us! Yet, I have just begun. This is merely an intro- duction to the topic of the spiritual father.

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 arguments that are labeled as “We are the original Christian Church,” refutations of papal infallibility, or historical reasons for our rejection of papal claims. The ratio- nal model doesn’t work because we are not providing our audience with a new way of seeing. Father Alexander writes, “Reason, unshrouded by the nous, continues to produce thoughts that are based on reason’s own self-preservation and self-glorification. In order for Hesychasm to be understood and properly ordered, the nous enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit must

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.”

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

Hesychasm is the Spirit of the Law that en- forses the Law. It is the incense of sweet spir- itual 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 freedom 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 arguments that are labeled 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 Alexis writes, “Reason, unshrouded by the nous, continues to produce thoughts that are based on reason’s own self-preservation and self-glorification. In order for Hesychasm to be understood and properly ordered, the nous enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit must
be re-established as king of the human heart. The tradi-
tional 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 ascetism 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 Or-
thodox catechesis, and this means we begin with ascet-icism and hesychasm. When we explain to them fasting and standing for the long services, we place those teachings in the context of those two great pil-
lars. 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, illumi-
nation, and deliverance are the 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, eth-
nic out of place stuck in the past.

In a world filled with anxiety, chaos, and disor-
der, people are unknowingly clamoring for an alterna-
tive. For those in the world who are mired in the pas-
time and unable to control burdensome and fearful passions, Saint Theologian and Saint Philotheos (Zervakos) points out the qualities of the good Con-
fessor or Spiritual Father using St. Arsenios of Paros (1800–1877) as his exemplar. These qualities are par-
ticularly the following: humility, gentleness, patience, discernment, compassion and love. These virtues, he says, Father Arsenios eminently possessed. Thus, he
reminds us, Arsenios accepted all with love and pater-
nal affection, and gave to all the love, gentleness, and words of advice 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 self-call-
ticism and the rest of the virtues, and in the keep-
ing of the Commandments of God — that she
surpassed all the other nuns. Thus there was ful-
filled the saying of the divine herald Paul the Apostle: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

Wishing to correct the nuns who hadacted wrongly towards her, the Saint called all the nuns into the church of the convent. "Together with some nuns," she was notified that her sister was outside the convent. When she saw her sister, Elder, what they did to me. Is it true? 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?” — “The bishop, 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 Christ, and no one will be able to harm you.” — “In me — they declared this to me clearly, and if I don’t kill you, to wash away the shame you have brought to my 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.”

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 sis-
ter had deviated from the right path; and when she was notified that her sister was outside the gate of the convent, and was not seen, 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 monks.” And tak-
ing 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 body 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.”

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, temper-
mance and the rest of the virtues, and in the keep-

ing of the Commandments of God — that she
surpassed all the other nuns. Thus there was ful-
filled the saying of the divine herald Paul the Apostle: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

When she met the prodigal, the younger son, he came to save the lost sheep. He mingled, con-
quered, clothed him with new ones and new shoes. He 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, not to save those who were saved. He came to save the astray, not to save those who were looking. He came to save those who were unconverted and ate with publicans, harlots, sinners, to-
wards 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 seri-
ously 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

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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 men, 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 murderers. 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, discretion, 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 deserve 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 three-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 dreadful judgement seat of God, we will be asked the following: Were you purificant in order to purify? Were you illumined so as to illuminate? 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.

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.
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. “Straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me.” 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.

Although he was a prolific writer, only three of his authentic works have been preserved. These are *Apology I and II*, and his *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon*. (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 apologists, 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 people of the Romans.” 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 acknowledge-ment.” “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.” Justin asks that the Emperor be “fair and equitable...” “It is incumbent on the lover of truth, by all means...to choose and do and say what is right.” “By mere application of a name, nothing is decided, either good or evil...” It is a matter of justice.

Shakespeare’s Julius asked her famous question: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet?” 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 its 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 early pagans philosophers? And those who now adopt such instruction are not restrained by you; but, on the contrary, bestow prizes and honors on those who euphoniously insult gods.”

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 dishon- or [interesting remark], by merely changing the form, they make into what they call gods...” Here Justin is of the same mind as the psalmist, who ridiculed the pagan gods as human fabrications and as being actually demons.

**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 is the beginning, the maker and the preserver of all things, 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.”

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 trans-formation 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 ene-mies. Many men and women “remain pure [i.e., celibate] at the age of sixty or seventy.” Many “have re-formed 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 acknowledges the emperor that they ac-knowledge him as king and ruler of men. They are obliged to pay him “taxes both ordinary and extraordi-nary.” “To God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you.”

At the end of the first century Justin’s apologetic work was the standard Christian witness. He was the first to establish a Christian school of thought. He was the first to build a Christian apologetic tradition.

**THE PROPHETS**

By his own testimony we know that Justin’s con-version 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 relates that “the fulfillment of the prophesies of 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 the “scep-tor will not depart from Judah... until He comes for whom it is reserved...” As prophesied by Zephaniah, Jesus entered Jerusalem on the final day of an era. “And Isai-ah 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 11). Isaiah foretold that “a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name, God with us.” The prophet Micah foretold that He would be born in Bethlehem. David spoke the words, “They shall pace my hands, and feet,” but his disciple did not understand.

Justin insists that the Spirit of prophecy speaks predicting things that are to come by day. 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 forebear, judging these sufficient for the persuasion of those who have ears to hear and understand...”
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 which we teach and say is 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 which was made flesh.18

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 memmoria 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 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 which over 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 of the 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 their 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.


3. Ibid., p. 199.


6. Ibid., p. 164.

7. Ibid., p. 163.

8. Ibid.


10. Sue Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapters V and VI.

11. Psalm 91.

12. First Apology, Chapters X, XI, XII.

13. First Apology, Chapters XVII.

14. Ibid., Chapters LXI.

15. Ibid., Chapters LXII.

16. Ibid., Chapters LXIII.-LXVII.
A n 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 recognize the Dynamic Marriage program is not for every couple, 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. 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And we quickly realize 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 locale. Parish priests and laypeople will be trained in the archdiocese, and those interested may ask their parish priest to begin a course in their parishes. Please do not hesitate to contact me at greg абдах@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 marriage."

**P. Gregory Abdalah**

**St. Mary Church, Wichita, Kansas**

**GRIEF IS A FUNNY THING**

Gregory Abdalah

**Precently 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. But, a weird feeling that can knock our feet out from under us when we 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 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? Am I not depressed? Am I not wallowing in sadness, but I do miss my mom. I do not think that is a bad thing or something to be ashamed of admitting. 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 posterity 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 Gethsemane prior to His voluntary and life-giving death. 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 crucifical, 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,” 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 sufficing, 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

Fr. Nicola Yanney: The First Priest Ordained by the First Bishop

Amy Hayley

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 Fih 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. Streets in the “Syrian” section of Omaha, Nebraska. Nicola and Martha 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 when his family, he would have to leave the only home that he 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. At the time, they were calling to him in Arabic. 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.

“Noah, why does the whole country fear you? Since the beginning, you have been the shepherd of my flock, and I have not had a single sheep lost. You must protect my flock. I have not heard your voice to tell me to let the sheep go. Your voice is not according to the Law. Let the wolf come in, and the sheep die. You must fight the wolf. A hireling will leave the sheep to flee, wherever he goes. He will not care about the sheep, but a hireling will leave the sheep and flee; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. He who is not a shepherd, leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf comes 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. 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
FATHER NICOLA

24 October 2018

The Word 25

power responsible for four young children, devoid of an

tion would be difficult to meet for the small com-

munity, but they would prove their commitment. An-

other problem still loomed, however. Including Father

Raphael, only four Syrian Orthodox priests served the

tire 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 cel-
ebrate 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 consen-
sus 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 devo-
tion to God. The people knew Nicola and trusted him
to guide them.

After much prayer and careful consideration, Nic-

ola accepted the community’s request. Father Raphael

was unable to come to Kearney to thoroughly examine

Nicola, but he instead sent Archimandrite Meletios

Karoun. Archimandrite Meletios recommended the

young widower be ordained with the condition that he
give up the family farm and move to town. The neces-
sary examinations were complete, and Nicola and the

community waited for news from Father Raphael.

In the meantime, the school building was suc-

cessfully purchased. Throughout the fall and win-
ter, 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 joy-

eous 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

waited for months, and then everything seemed jump

into action.

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 or-
dained a priest – reader, subdeacon, deacon – and the

process took two weeks. Finally, during the Palm Sun-
day 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 priest-

tly 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 and was given the task of pastor-
ing 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 daunt-

ing 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

The Gospel Book in

Father Nicola’s hand was a

gift given to him by his par-

ishioners in Kearney in this

1902. It remains in St.

George Orthodox Church

in Kearney, Nebraska to this
day. The Arabic script above

is Father Nicola’s signa-

ture: “al-Khoury Nicola

Yanney.”

The Arabic script above

is Father Nicola’s signa-

ture: “al-Khoury Nicola

Yanney.”
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 gatherings, 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 Flue 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.”

“Thus the Father knew Me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15).

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.

The next several years were brimming with missionary visits, marriages, funerals, baptisms, chrismations, and the daily responsibilities of a parish priest.

“Then the world shall see Me in you” (John 17:20).

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 doctors could do for her. George and Rebecca had been blessed with a son they named John Elias George Yanney.

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 Spanish Flu epidemic raged through the United States from October 1918 through June 1919. The virus, which is now known as the Spanish Flu, killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide. 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.

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.

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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, as a record-setting 200 participants gathered and dwelt in unity with God and His Church. Serving and praying for others, along with repentance and forgiveness, properly fills the void of loneliness.

Workshop speaker Katrina Bittar, 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 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 others and serve 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 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.

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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 with 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 Larkfense 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, Jamal Malone, St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church of Irving, California, Peter Mustian, Archdeacon Saeed Rihani and Han Aboug-hazaleh, 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 Kyea 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.

2. Go to http://west.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 Annual 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 Westernman 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. All the wonderful volunteers at St. George, Canton, along with the Midwest SOYO Spiritual Advisor Fr. Michael Sakran of St. John, Ft. Wayne, and Fr. Basil Shaheen of St. George, hosted everyone to the Banquet and Hall, 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 Dr. 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. Anthony, Parma Heights, OH
3. St. George, Flint, MI

Division II (Ages 15–18)
1. St. George, 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 Taylor, Pennsylvania, the icon's home parish. It 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, Fr. Rev. Fr. Joseph Allen said, "I had heard of the famous Icon of 'Our Lady of Tender Heart,' but never thought we could bring it into our community, but I never expected how strong would be its impact. Now we pray that same 'Tender Heart' 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 Church in 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 Thuman, 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 blessed 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.
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 for Scouts. For more information about her, please visit her website at www.eocs.org.

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.
In continuing the traditions of the Apostles, par- taking 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 beyond the soul. Plovers 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 continue upon continuing steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.

At my Orthodox school, the student body is com- posed of many different denominations. We read about the early Church Fathers and their writings. We discuss what the Church Fathers thought of the impor- tance 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 Greg- ory 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 func- tion 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 grappling conversations and a few arguments, class had ended but our conversation never did. Even kids who are not yet Orthodox are still discussing what the Church Fathers thought of the im- ages of the preparation done before we take communion, and praying the same prayers. 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 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 fol- low 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. Tradi- tion 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 fullness of the faith, we must be constantly and steadfastly following in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. Tradition would be lost without our con- nection to the Apostolic Fathers and their faith.

I volunteer in the elementary Sunday school class- es at my parish. Here, the children participate in the “Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.” Catechesis en- gages the whole child—mind, body, and soul. The chil- dren walk into the class room, which is kept as a sa- cred and quiet space, much like a sanctuary, where they act out several holy traditions. They first sit around the teacher where they read a verse followed by per- sonal meditation. Afterwards, they take turns sitting at a miniature altar, where they prepare the altar, light a candle, and pray in front of an icon of Christ, creating an image of the preparation done before we take commu- nion. 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 fellowshipped through learned doctrine: they broke bread. And they prayed. The Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship must be fol- lowed steadfastly in order for the fullness of the faith to be preserved for generations to come. These children made that fact extremely clear for me. The light of Christ shone through them all through- out their class time. My sister lit a candle, reverenced an icon, and stood timelessly with the Apostles in the fullness of the faith. So may I, so may we all.
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