

THE WORD

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THE WORD

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

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CHANGE IS IMMINENT

BISHOP JOHN

PEOPLE ARE MOVING AROUND MORE FREQUENTLY THAN EVER BEFORE. SOMETIMES WE MOVE TO BE CLOSER TO FAMILY OR FRIENDS, SOMETIMES TO FIND A MORE PLEASANT CLIMATE, OR BECAUSE OF A CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT. REGARDLESS OF THE REASON, MOVING ALWAYS COMES WITH GREAT CHANGES. WE LEAVE FAMILIAR PLACES, OUR HOMES, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS AND CHURCHES.

These changes cause us stress and engender anxiety. What role does the church have in our many transitions? Each of us is used to a particular parish, with its unique icons, architecture, music and people. Sometimes these changes are relatively slight, as when new people come into the church. Other times, the changes can be destabilizing, as when we adapt to a new parish. In both cases, the old-timers in the parish and the newly transplanted parishioners have to adjust to each other. Every time anyone comes into a family system or moves out of it, the whole family needs to adjust. This certainly applies to the parish family that one leaves, as well as the parish into which one is finding one's place.

The adjustment is often radical, and even painful. Sometimes the person moving out of a parish held leadership positions, such as treasurer, choir director, or priest. This person moving into another parish may have gifts and offerings that the community hadn't had before. Such a move can mean radical changes in both the old and new parishes. Other moves may offer less obvious, but still significant opportunities. It must be this way, because God has made each of us unique. No one has each of our particular gifts and experiences of life. A community made up of unique persons comes together in a way that is by nature irreplaceable and irreproducible. How marvelous God has made all things, each reflecting something spectacular of the living God. What an opportunity, both for the person moving and for the community, to expand our experiences of God!

I understand that many people don't like change.

We enjoy not having to adjust. We are comforted when we can predict how everything will be, and even how others will respond. This is true even when our relationships are problematic: we think we know what to expect. All change, however, requires work, as we constantly get new information. This is true even when people we know and have known for a long time change. We need to adjust to the spiritual and intellectual growth of others as they mature. We can find this difficult. When the people around us grow and repent, they are like new people. We need to make room for the changes. When we grow, too, our cohorts also need to adjust. God gives us opportunities to be born anew, and we all constantly change in response. If we remember that even what is most familiar is constantly changing can allow us to be deliberately flexible and open-minded. This will help us minimize confusion, misunderstandings and difficulties. The Church is a place of multifaceted relationships. These relationships can help us, distress us, and allow us to grow in our relationship with God.

To prepare for the reception of new members at Pascha, the church prescribed a forty-day fast. This time of intense prayer and sacrifice allowed the community an opportunity to be deliberate about adjusting to new members. We all need to be born anew as the community reconstitutes itself with each new person.

This is holy and natural. It is a gift from God, but still requires work, effort, patience and kindness. Without this effort, we are not doing what we are

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

Founded in Arabic as
Al Kalimat in 1905
by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)
Founded in English as
The WORD in 1957
by Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir)

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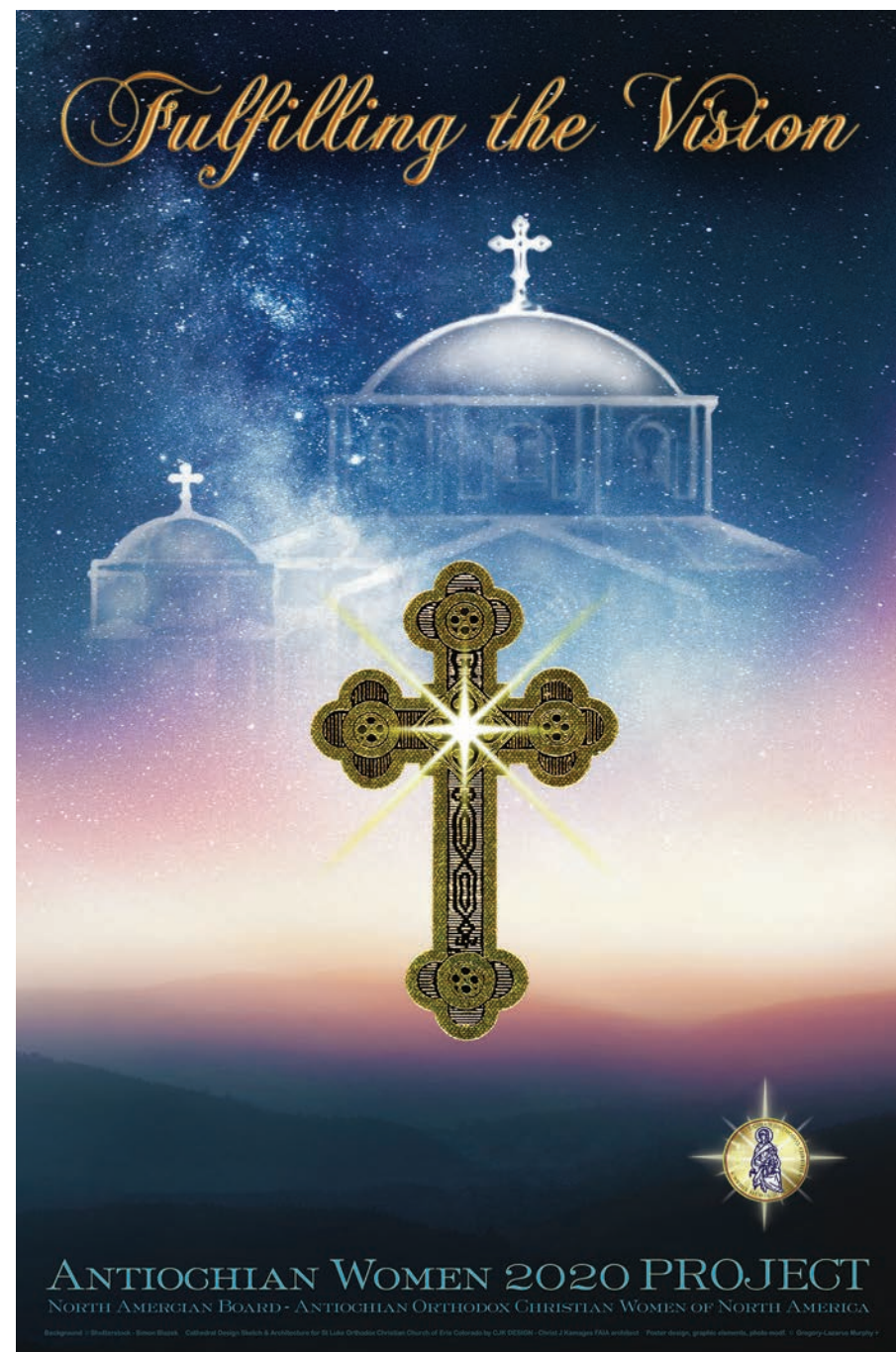
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called to do in God's Church. In the Church we are not only called to do God's work, we are called to do it His way. It is God who calls us to Himself and gives us each other. We need to open our hearts and minds to the opportunities that this avails us. We need to share the ministries of the parish, and share the opportunities to learn from each other and teach each other. Through this, through each member of the body of Christ who is new to us, we will learn more about God.

I understand that change is difficult. With so many radical changes in technology, communications, work, social mores, politics, and globalization, church is the last place we want to see change. At least one day a week we can hope things will remain relatively the same. I am not suggesting radical change in the parish, just openness and kindness as Christ continues to reveal Himself to us. He leads us to salvation, together with those whom God calls to walk with us today, with those who walked with us before, and with those who will walk with us in future generations.



54th MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION

Convened
at the
Amway Grand
Plaza Hotel
Grand Rapids,
Michigan

Thursday, July 25, 2019 – 11:07 AM

I. Opening Prayer

His Eminence the Most Rev. Metropolitan JOSEPH, Primate, opened the General Assembly with prayer and the Troparion of Holy Pentecost.

II. Roll Call and Quorum

Upon the call of Metropolitan JOSEPH, Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, declared the existence of a quorum and the qualification to conduct the business of the Archdiocese. Of a possible 780 delegates, 565 were present in person or by proxy, constituting 72% of the total possible votes.

III. Introduction of North American Hierarchs

His Eminence noted the absence of His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER because of illness. He introduced Their Graces Bishop BASIL, Bishop THOMAS, Bishop JOHN, Bishop ANTHONY, and Bishop NICHOLAS. He asked for a standing ovation in recognition of their good work. His Eminence also thanked Almighty God for the good clergy of the Archdiocese.

IV. Appointment of Convention Officers

Metropolitan JOSEPH asked Archpriest Thomas Zain, Vicar General, to announce the appointment of the

Sergeants-at-Arms of the convention: Mr. Philip Saliba, Mr. Elie Haig, Ms. Carol Laham, and Ms. Karen Kinan.

V. Introduction of the Members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Fr. Zain acknowledged the officers of the Antiochian Archdiocese: Mr. Fawaz El-Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, Esq., Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Salim Abboud, Treasurer and CFO of the Archdiocese, V. Rev. Fr. Michael Ellias, Secretary of the Archdiocese, V. Rev. Fr. Timothy Ferguson, Protosyngellos, Rev. Fr. Nicholas Belcher, Episcopal Assistant, and Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Esq., Chancellor.

Fr. Zain invited the members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees who were present to introduce themselves: Mr. Daniel J. Abraham, Mr. Edward E. Assile, Mr. Richard Ayoub, Esq., Mr. Dr. David G. Bojrab, Mr. Dan Braun, Mr. Roger David, Mr.

George G. Darany (Honorary), Ms. Darlene Haddad, Dr. Elias K. Hebekka, Mr. Elie J. Haig, Mr. Khalil E. Kardous, Ms. Karen Kinan, Ms. Carol Laham, Esq., Mr. Gregory H. Laham, Jr., Mr. William





D. Morrison, Ms. Dianne O'Regan, Ms. Rebecca Pagani, Mr. Mansour O. Rayan, Mr. Philip N. Saliba, Mr. Elias Shaheen, Mr. Douglas J. Skaff, Mr. Rami Younes, and Mr. Dimitri C. Zeidan.

Absent members were Mr. Michael Homsey,

Esq., Dr. George Madanat, Dr. Nicholas J. Massad, Ms. Kelli Kouri Neagle, Mr. Majed J. Nesheiwat, Mr. Alan Rossi, and Dr. George Thomas.

VI. Minutes of the 53rd Archdiocese Convention, Hollywood, Florida, July 2017

Dr. Elias Hebeka moved to accept the Minutes of the 53rd Archdiocese Convention held in Hollywood, Florida, in July 2017. Fr. Joseph Purpura seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Metropolitan JOSEPH noted in the minutes that Fr. Michael Laffoon had requested a full report on all endowment funds and how they are invested. Dr. Hebeka said it would be explained in his report.

Metropolitan JOSEPH also asked about the goal of increasing the maximum stipend from the Retired Clergy Housing Allowance Fund for retired clergy and widowed clergy wives. Fr. Elias responded that the main emphasis is now on increasing retirement savings through the new 401(k) plan.

His Eminence recalled that His Grace Bishop ANTOUN of thrice-blessed memory made a final and moving public appearance at the Archdiocese Convention in Miami. He also celebrated the memory of His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory.

VII. Report of the Department of Finance

A. Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2019

Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO and Treasurer, presented the Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2019, which had previously been distributed to all the parishes and is appended hereto. He offered an overview of the archdiocesan finances for the last five years.

Mr. Abboud acknowledged his co-workers at the Archdiocese Headquarters: Mr. Sameh Khouzam, Comptroller, Ms. Teresa Ruggiero, Ms. Jennifer Huarcaya, Rev. Fr. Paul Matar, and Ms. Marlene Ayoub.

Mr. Abboud introduced the members of the various committees and summarized each committee's purpose and responsibilities. He emphasized that the Department of Finance is making an effort to include as many people and diverse perspectives as possible in order to manage archdiocesan resources responsibly. He noted, however, that the Department still needs a communications committee in order to explain the operations of the Archdiocese with transparency. Mr. Abboud announced that his slide presentation would appear in *The WORD* magazine, and that Deacon Christian will post it on the archdiocesan website.

Fr. Ghattas Hajal moved to accept the report. Fr. Christopher Salamy seconded the motion.

Questions from the floor:

Fr. Michael Tassos noted Mr. Abboud's not having reported on an external audit. He thanked Mr. Abboud for the innumerable hours of volunteer labor he has given. He also explained that the Department has engaged an external auditor for a review of archdiocesan finances and procedures.

Kh. Claudia Zain expressed admiration for Mr. Abboud's presentation and his dedicated work.

Fr. Anthony Bahou asked about the line item for Continuing Pastoral Education. Fr. Thomas Zain clarified that the amount was the stipend for the former director of the St. Stephen's Course of Studies program, but those payments have discontinued under the new structure.

Mr. Richard Power of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, rose to say that he had sent a letter to Mr. Abboud outlining his concern for an external audit and other issues. Mr. Abboud responded that Mr. Power had already received a response to his questions via email which he had sent earlier in the day.

Mr. Kardous thanked Mr. Abboud for an excellent and detailed report. He asked the Assembly to consider if parishes would be willing to pay for an external audit which could be quite expensive. He noted that the Department is building a system so that an external audit would be possible and cost-effective.

The motion passed and the report was approved unanimously.

B. Proposed Budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021

At the recommendation of an external auditor, the Department has begun working on a consolidated report for all the institutions of the Archdiocese in order to decide whether it is feasible and appropriate to apply Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) policy to archdiocesan finances. The Board of Trustees has established a committee to determine if it is appropriate to use GAAP principles. The adoption of those principles could have implications for the audit of all parishes or a sampling of parishes.

Mr. Abboud, CFO and Treasurer, presented the Proposed Budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. He explained that the 2020 budget is conservative and flat in order to examine the departmental expenses more closely. His presentation is appended hereto.

Fr. Maximos Saikali moved to approve the Pro-

posed Budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. Mr. Gregory Abdalah seconded the motion.

Discussion on the Motion:

Fr. Fouad Saba observed the absence of an amount of receipts from the Miami Convention on page 1, line C 5, Receipts for Archdiocese Convention from Host Parish.

The motion passed as amended by Fr. Saba's observation.

For the sake of transparency Mr. Abboud also provided an overview of the archdiocesan Balance Sheet via slide presentation.

Dr. Elias Hebeka presented the report of the Investment Committee via slide presentation. He reported that the committee has consolidated many accounts and has established an investment policy statement of purpose and goal for each account and endowment as well as an investment strategy. He addressed the question of Fr. Laffoon raised at the Miami Convention. He reported on all fund performances. Total assets have grown by more than \$6 million, while the expense ratio for advisory fees has significantly declined.

Fr. Elia Shalhoub moved to accept the report, and Fr. Joseph Rahal seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The General Assembly adjourned at 12:58 PM for lunch.

The General Assembly reconvened at 2:15 PM.

After the recess Mr. Abboud continued his review of the policy and practice of the Department.

Technology and Policy Committee – Mr. Abboud recognized the work of Rev. Deacon Christian Manasseh, Chair, and states that there needs to be enhanced development of all archdiocesan communication venues.

Legacy Project – Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, Chair, is investigating an insurance program to insure potential donors so that the Antiochian Archdiocese would receive the death benefit in order to facilitate long-term stability.

Real Estate and Insurance Committee – Mr. Edward Assile, Chair, has been requesting copies of the insurance policies of all parishes and institutions of the Archdioceses in order to assure that sufficient coverage is in force; however, some churches have not yet responded.

Mr. Elkhoury noted that not all church assets are in the name of the church. The committee has discovered that some accounts are under name of the



pastor or another individual.

Food for Hungry People – Mr. Abboud confirmed that all funds are being disbursed from this program to legitimate causes. Ms. Anne Thomas and Fr. Ted Pulcini are developing a new initiative to make grants to parishes for local distribution. For accountability purposes the administrators will ask for pictures from events, financial statements, and other documentation for review and in order to encourage additional or enhanced efforts.

VIII. Reports from Archdiocesan Departments and Organizations

The Archdiocese office had previously submitted electronic copies of departmental and organizational reports to the parishes for review and comment. Those reports are available for viewing on the archdiocesan website.

Outgoing President of NAC Teen SOYO, Elizabeth Lengyel-Leahu, presented the organization's report.

1985 NAC Teen SOYO President, Fr. Michael Nasser, moved to accept the report. Mr. Mike Simon seconded the motion. The Assembly received the report.

Fr. Joseph Purpura, Chair, presented the report for the **Department of Youth**. He noted that this year NAC Teen SOYO is celebrating its 50th anniversary and shares that date with the first moon landing. New efforts include a grant for \$100,000 for a parish mentoring program with a potential for three additional years.

Fr. Purpura reported that 61 orators participated in the Oratorical Festivals this year, and 57 participated last year. This year 123 teams participated in the Bible Bowl. He announced that the Gospel of John will be the topic for the Bible Bowl next year, and John 3:17 will be the topic for the Oratorical Festival.

Fr. Purpura concluded his report by announcing that, to date, \$277,500 have been awarded in scholarships from the Francis Maria Scholarship Fund, and the fund now holds more than \$400,000.

Fr. Antoun Araj moved to accept the report. 1990 NAC Teen SOYO President Ms. Julie Abboud seconded the motion. The Assembly received the report.

Mr. Wayne Parr, Chair, presented the report for **Young Adult Ministry (YAM)**. Mr. Parr explained that YAM is largely a ministry for young adults under the age of 35. YAM hosts a conference for young professionals on the alternate year of the convention.

There were 210 participants at the conference in Denver, Colorado, and he announced that the 2020 conference will be in Austin, Texas.

Mrs. Barbara Hebekka moved to accept the report. Ms. Angela Saliby seconded the motion.

Fr. Timothy Baclig noted that YAM's predecessors had worked as a Pan-Orthodox movement to unite young people across jurisdictions.

Mr. Kal Kardoos asked how many YAM participants are attending this convention. Mr. Parr responded that at least 81 were participating on a group text, and Convention Co-Chairman Alan Abraham reported that there were at least 135 YAM registrants.

Ms. Marsha Nimr asked what happens to next age group beyond YAM, including the young married population. Mr. Elkhoury responded that Fr. Thomas Zain FTZ and others are in the process of generating programs for that demographic.

Fr. Milad Selim thanked His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH for the opportunity to work with the young adults, and he stressed that YAM was a movement of young adults striving to address the church's position on current issues across jurisdictions.

Fr. Michael Nasser noted that Tuesday's clergy meeting had the longest and most in depth discussion about the engagement of young people.

Fr. Fouad Saba strongly recommended that YAM be structured with a constitution and officers to cultivate future leaders in the Archdiocese. Mr. Parr responded that the young adults did not necessarily want officers, but it is an on-going discussion.

Metropolitan JOSEPH stressed the importance of this subject. He encouraged the faithful to be patient and to give the youth the freedom to explore and find themselves. He stated that our love and support are important and that YAM is only one tool we are using to attract the youth back to the church and to themselves.

The Assembly received the report.

Dianne O'Regan, President, presented the report of the **North American Board of the Antiochian Women**.

Ms. O'Regan introduced the incoming officers of the Antiochian Women: Kh. Suzanne Murphy (President), Ms. Sheryl Vanderwagen (Vice President), Ms. Dorothy Tampary (Recording Secretary), Ms. Laila Ferris (Treasurer), and Kh. Kelli Lynn Barberg (PR Director).

Kh. Suzanne Murphy moved to accept the report, and Ms. Nancy Tanzaris seconded the motion.

The Assembly received the report.

Mr. Roger David, National Chairman, presented the report of the **Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch**.

Mr. Dan Abraham moved to accept the report, and Fr. Ghatas Hajal seconded the motion.

Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor thanked Mr. David on behalf of the more than 2200 members of the Order and the Governing Council.

Fr. Joseph Rahal noted the Order's on-going support of clergy and camp scholarships.

NAC Teens and officers thanked the Order for everything the Order has done.

The Assembly received the report.

Ms. Karen Kinan introduced a program called **HOST (Helping Orthodox Students Thrive)** with the purpose of making sure that when students leave home for college, there will be people and a place to receive them.

Fr. Christopher Salamy moved to accept the report. Fr. Joseph Purpura seconded the motion.

Deacon Andrew Andrews suggested that HOST could dovetail with a local parish connection and OCF Chapters.

The Assembly received the report.

Questions and Comments regarding reports of departments and organizations.

Fr. Nektarios Najjar asked the **Department of Christian Education** for an update on a new curriculum. Ms. Carole Buleza, Chair, reported that an announcement will appear online, describing the production of new materials. Ms. Buleza is seeking approval of a proposal for a new offering which would move from an informational curriculum to a spiritual and formational curriculum. There would be lessons introducing students to Teen SOYO, YES, camp counselors, and YAM, in order to help students take the next step on their journeys. She wants to publish two grade levels at a time.

Deacon Andrews noticed five reports in which Departments wanted to move forward but did not have sufficient funds. He asked if there was insufficient funding or if the Departments did not know how to make a justifiable request. Several departments outlined potential projects, and Mr. Salim Abboud assured the Assembly that there would be a continuing review of departmental functions and requirements, and that all priorities would be taken into consideration.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:05 PM, following a prayer by His Grace Bishop BASIL.

Friday, July 26, 2019, 11:00 AM

Metropolitan JOSEPH opened the session with prayer at 11:10 AM and a reading from 1 Corinthians 4:9–13.

IX. Address of Metropolitan JOSEPH to the 54th Archdiocese Convention

The address of the Metropolitan will appear in the November 2019 issue of *The WORD* magazine.

**X. Presentation of Proposed Resolutions – Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor and Chairman of the Department of Legal Affairs
RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION
TO THE HOST PARISH**

WHEREAS St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, has graciously hosted the 54th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention at the historic Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019;

AND WHEREAS the Pastor, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Nasser, and the Convention Co-Chairpersons, Allen Abraham and Kathy Abraham, together with their the entire Convention Committee, the Parish Council, and all the faithful have worked tirelessly and spared no effort to assure the success of this Convention, providing wonderful hospitality for our every need, family fellowship, and spiritual growth;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this 54th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019, in unanimity and by acclamation extends to the Host Pastor and the entire Convention Committee its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for an outstanding and extraordinary convention.

**RESOLUTION PLEDGING OUR SUPPORT
AND LOVE TO OUR**

**MOTHER CHURCH OF ANTIOCH
AND TO PATRIARCH JOHN X**

WHEREAS the hierarchs, clergy, Board of Trustees, and faithful, under the leadership of our beloved Metropolitan JOSEPH, Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, having met in General Assembly at the 54th Biennial Convention of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America on this 26th day of July, 2019, in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and

WHEREAS this General Assembly conveys

its heart-filled greetings and love to our Father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X, and to the entire See of the Great Church of Antioch; and

WHEREAS the conflict in Syria has begun to wind down and the country regains its territorial integrity, we reaffirm our commitment and support to assist the Patriarchate in the long, hard, and difficult task of the rebuilding of Syria; and

WHEREAS this General Assembly further commits its loyalty and support to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, in his ongoing efforts to resolve the canonical issue that continues between the Patriarchate of Antioch and that of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem concerning Qatar; and

WHEREAS this General Assembly offers its additional support and prayers to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, for his leadership skills and continuing efforts as the catalyst of peace in the resolution of the dispute between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and that of the Patriarchate of Moscow regarding Ukraine, where the effects of this schism are being felt on these shores and in all the Orthodox world;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, this 54th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 22–29, 2019, in unanimity and by acclamation, commits its love, loyalty, support and prayers to our Mother Church of the Great See of Antioch and to our Father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X, praying that Almighty God continue to guide His Beatitude as he continues his efforts to bring peace and conciliation between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem and between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow. We extend our support and prayers for the rebuilding of Syria and to its people. We offer our humble prayers for the good health of Patriarch JOHN X. Many years Master!

**RESOLUTION HONORING
HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP
DEMETRIOS AND WELCOMING
HIS EMINENCE
ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS
OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA**

WHEREAS the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 54th Antiochian Orthodox

Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Grand Rapids, Michigan;

AND WHEREAS, since his election as Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America on August 19, 1999, His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS has served the Archdiocese, as its Primate, with faith, zeal and devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church;

AND WHEREAS His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS has been an exemplary model in working vigorously to preserve unity among all Orthodox throughout the United States;

AND WHEREAS His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS has also served the Church in promoting learning and the Christian formation of clergy and laity as a respected scholar, author and professor;

AND WHEREAS His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS ended his tenure as Archbishop of America with his letter of resignation to His All Holiness Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW;

AND WHEREAS His Eminence Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS was elected as the new Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America on May 11, 2019, and enthroned on June 22, 2019;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this 54th Archdiocese Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019, in unanimity and by acclamation, expresses its deep appreciation and love to His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS for his twenty years of dedicated service in the vineyard of our Lord, as Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this 54th Archdiocese Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019, in unanimity and by acclamation, offers its love and prayers for the success of His Eminence Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS as he begins his *diakonia* for us to advance together as the Body of Christ and body of believers, as a united Church.

**RESOLUTION CALLING FOR
A SYNAXIS OF ALL ORTHODOX
AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCHES
BY THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH**

WHEREAS the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 54th Antiochian Orthodox

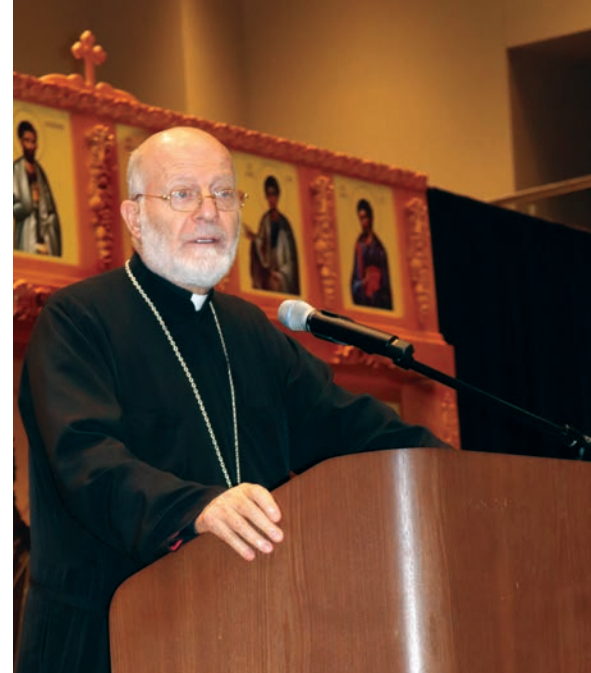
Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Grand Rapids, Michigan;

AND WHEREAS, in the recent past, we have all witnessed the sorrowful and tragic situation in Ukraine concerning the unilateral actions of the Ecumenical Patriarch, which have and continue to promote permanent division among all members of the Orthodox Church; (these actions represent a failure to constitute a single Orthodox Church in accor-



dance with Her ecclesiological and canonical principles, and brings harm to Her apostolic witness);

AND WHEREAS, as a result of these actions, the Orthodox Church of Russia broke off communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and we now experience the negative effects here in the United States and Canada as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and the



Moscow Patriarchate in North America no longer share communion with Churches under the Ecumenical Patriarchate; (examples of the unity which have been disrupted include pan-Orthodox services and participation in local Orthodox Clergy brotherhoods, and so forth; these hinder our common witness to the faithful and to the local communities in which we exist);

AND WHEREAS, as a further result of this division and disharmony, schismatic clergymen from uncanonical bodies in Ukraine could begin to serve in canonical jurisdictions, thereby creating further disharmony and chaos here and in other parts of the world, where we would otherwise have fraternal participation in unity;

AND WHEREAS the appearance of disunity also occurs when the Orthodox Church is reduced to one dimension of a “nationalistic distinction” (such as ethnic background, language, or affiliation), which in turn becomes the basis for the “ecclesiastical” organization, thus resulting in a number of bishops claiming pastoral responsibility for the same geographic region, as if they represented separate Churches rather than the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church;

AND WHEREAS, on the basis of its historic primacy, the long-standing role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as a center in service of Orthodox unity, is to lead and coordinate by bringing together, not to act in a unilateral manner; (this primacy of honor is exercised within the context of collegiality, conciliarity and non-interference in the internal affairs of the Local Churches);

AND WHEREAS any approach for granting autocephaly must be in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and consequently must respect the

necessity of obtaining the prior agreement of all Orthodox Autocephalous Churches;

AND WHEREAS there is a necessity to resort to the principle of unanimity and conciliation, concerning both our common Orthodox work and our unified positions on controversial issues; (this unanimity and conciliation are true safeguards of Orthodox unity);

AND WHEREAS there is a necessity for spiritual vigilance regarding the stumbling block and snare of political entanglement, which history has shown only serves to weaken the Orthodox Church and Her united witness;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 54th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019, calls upon His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, to convoke a Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches in order to discuss the current situation in Ukraine, to settle the issue of granting autocephaly to new Churches, to resolve wider ecclesiological issues regarding primacy, and in general to address our common problems through fraternal support, unity and participation.

RESOLUTION HONORING ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL AND AMERICAN LEBANESE SYRIAN ASSOCIATED CHARITIES

WHEREAS the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 54th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Grand Rapids, Michigan;

AND WHEREAS, more than 80 years ago,

prominent entertainer, Danny Thomas, the son of Lebanese immigrants to the United States, having early endured personal difficulties, sought refuge in prayer and made a vow to St. Jude (Thaddeus), the patron saint of lost causes, was heard saying “Show me my way in life and I will build you a shrine”;

AND WHEREAS, after successfully finding his way in life and in order to fulfill his promise and bring his vow to a reality, in 1957, Danny Thomas founded the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC), whose sole mission was to help build St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and raise funds and awareness necessary for the operation and maintenance of the Hospital;

AND WHEREAS Thomas's vision became a reality when St. Jude Children's Research Hospital opened its doors on February 4, 1962, today one of the world's premier pediatric research institutions that treats children from all walks of life, regardless of race, color, creed or family's ability to pay;

AND WHEREAS St. Jude Children's Research Hospital leads the way in which the world understands, treats and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases, and whose sole mission is to save children, and to find and advance cures for pediatric cancers;

AND WHEREAS, through the direct efforts of ALSAC, and its tireless efforts and persistent fundraising and awareness programs, the financial framework to keep St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in existence has been assured for many, many years to come;

AND WHEREAS the current yearly budget of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, this year alone, exceeds one billion dollars and continues to grow, and still no patient or their family must pay for

its life-saving medical treatment and services;

AND WHEREAS, for almost 60 years, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital has been a beacon of hope for countless innocent children who suffer from a myriad of diseases, and has been at the forefront of innovative and ground-breaking medical advances in the treatment of childhood cancers and other life-threatening diseases;

AND WHEREAS, for many years to come, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, with its world-acclaimed faculty and staff, will continue to advance the cause of finding cures and treatment options for children around the world, as a testament to the faith and resilience of ALSAC, its founders, benefactors, supporters and staff;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this 54th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Grand Rapids, Michigan, from July 21–28, 2019, in unanimity and by acclamation, conveys its deep gratitude, love, appreciation, and respect to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, to the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC), to the faculty, its many supporters, benefactors, and entire staff. We commend you and salute you for your wonderful dedication and the work you continue to do in this most worthy cause. We pray that Almighty God bless each and every one of you and that His loving hand continue to guide you in all your work.

The General Assembly approved all five resolutions by acclamation.

XI. Old Business

XII. New Business

A. Report on the 2021 Archdiocese Convention – St. George Cathedral, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Mr. Raed Sweiss and Ms. Carole Jazzar, Co-Chairs, Department of Convention Planning,

introduced Fr. Joshua Mackoul, Pastor of St. George Cathedral, Ms. Kweilin Nassar, and Dr. Stephen Esper. The committee announced a room rate of \$149 per night at the Wyndham Grand Hotel in Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle. A video presentation highlighted many Pittsburgh attractions.

Bishop THOMAS moved to accept the report. Fr. John Salem seconded the motion. The Assembly received the report.

B. Report on Bids for the 2023 Archdiocese Convention – St. George Church, Phoenix, Arizona

Mr. Sweiss and Ms. Jazzar introduced Fr. Christopher Salamy and Sub-deacon Gregory Abdalah to represent St. George Church of Phoenix. They made a video presentation and announced a room rate of \$185 per night at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Hotel.



Fr. Estephan of St. Mary's Church in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, had expressed interest in bidding for this convention, but the committee viewed the bid as premature due to a lack of hotel space in the city. They encouraged a future bid.

The Assembly accepted the bid of St. George Church of Phoenix.

C. Report on Bids for the 2025 Archdiocese Convention – St. George Church, Cicero, Illinois

Ms. Sweiss and Ms. Jazzar announced that for the first time the Archdiocese was entertaining bids for a convention six years in advance. They introduced Fr. Fouad Saba and Ms. Darlene Haddad to make the presentation for St. George Church of Cicero, Illinois. They announced a room rate of \$189 per night plus \$10 per night for parking at the Hyatt

O'Hare Airport Hotel.

Fr. Joseph Purpura moved to accept the bid. Kh. Hajal seconded the motion. The Assembly accepted the bid.

D. Fr. Thomas Zain, Vicar General, announced that the Board of Trustees and the Governing Council of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch would meet in Brooklyn, October 18–20, 2019. Events that weekend would mark the 125th anniversary of St. Nicholas and the 100th anniversary of its State Street location.

E. Report of the Nominating Committee for the Board of Trustees – Archpriest Thomas Zain, Chair, presented the slate of candidates for the Archdiocese Board of Trustees.

Prior to elections, Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed Mr. Gregory Laham as an honorary lifetime member of the Board of Trustees in recognition of his long-time sacrificial service to the Archdiocese. He then appointed Mr. Rami Younes to fulfill the remaining two years of Mr. Laham's full term.

Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed Mr. Fawaz Elkhoury, Mr. Mansour Rayan, Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, Ms. Kelly Khoury Nagle, and Mr. James Moses to full terms on the Board of Trustees.

Fr. Joseph Purpura moved that the Secretary cast one unanimous ballot for the submitted list of nominees. Dr. Elias Hebeka seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the Assembly elected the following nominees to the Archdiocese Board of Trustees:

- Mr. Daniel Abraham
- Mr. Edward Assile
- Mr. Richard Ayoub
- Mr. Dan Braun
- Mr. Elie J. Haig
- Ms. Darlene Haddad
- Ms. Carol Lahalm
- Mr. Douglas Skaff
- Dr. George Thomas
- Mr. Dimitri Zeidan

XIII. Adjournment and Closing Prayer

Fr. Ghattas Hajal moved to adjourn the Assembly. Fr. Demetri Darwish seconded the motion. The motion passed, and His Grace Bishop ANTHONY closed the General Assembly with prayer at 1:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
V. Rev. Fr. Michael Ellias, Secretary
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
North America

"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

COURAGE IN CHRIST

Archpriest Noah Bushelli

(A homily given at the Archdiocesan Convention)

We are enjoying such gracious hospitality and peace in Christ during this holy convention, but don't forget: *We are warriors!* Our foes are fierce, the battle lines drawn, and casualties piled high.

America's greatest generation beat the communists on foreign shores. We won the Cold War. The time-bomb of atheistic Marxism, however, was snuck into our society through the academy and exploded in the sexual revolution – Woodstock was fifty years ago – undermining traditional church, family, and humanity.

Marriage is mocked by divorce and debauchery. Babies are avoided and aborted. We outsource

The problem is that we have lost God as the center of our lives.

Perhaps we are just simply weak and weary, isolated and satiated, distressed and distracted, leaving many of our parishes bleeding, infected, and on life-support.

No wonder we are considered successful when we merely keep the doors open. No wonder we are tempted to betray the faith in shame, vanity, and laziness. No wonder we stay silent, clinging to society's acceptance and our tax-exempt status.

Let's stop and ask ourselves: Have we laid aside the great commission, like fishing nets, to jump into the sea and swim with the fish? Have we become too sophisticated for the Holy Fathers, allowing science

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

our loved ones to daycares, secular schools, nursing homes, and funeral parlors. We bring anti-Christian media into our homes to mesmerize and catechize us. Sixty percent of our children leave the faith. *Why?*

Perhaps we are the salt losing its saltiness. Perhaps we are the city hiding behind the hill. Perhaps we are forgetting our call as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." Perhaps we have only half-renounced the world to begin with, and are torn between our two masters. Perhaps we're persuaded by the propaganda of our opponent, suggesting we replace dogma and holiness with accommodation and compromise.

Perhaps we need to listen to Elder Paisios, who gives us the answer to anxiety by reframing the problem: not drugs, alcohol, tranquilizers, psychiatric treatment . . . yoga, new age or eastern meditation.

and shallow scholarship to supplant Scripture and Tradition? Have we, like Esau, sold our birthright for a bowl of lentils?

We are warriors! Not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. The battle is for the hearts and minds of our people. Do we have the courage of David, to step out against Goliath with only a sling and a prayer?

I do. I have courage in Christ with you because of the clergy and faithful in a forgotten California logging town, who introduced me, a spacy, self-centered flower-child, to the One who clothes the lilies of the field. I – *we* – have courage in Christ, who illumines many, like us, hung-over from nihilism and narcissism, progressivism, and individualism. We have



courage in Christ under the protecting veil of our Champion Leader, surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses and the heavenly hosts.

We have courage in Christ in today’s readings and saints: in our Lord’s healing the bleeding woman and calling us out of isolation; in St. Paul’s reminder that, though enslaved to the world, in putting on Christ we are redeemed, liberated, adopted by God; in St. Paraskeva of Rome, who dedicated her wealth and beauty solely to God’s glory; in St. Jacob of Alaska, who overcame obstacles in language and logistics, failing health, and fellow-ministers to preach the gospel to his people.

We have courage in Christ in our convention theme (thank you, Sayidna, for your courageous leadership!), “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” This apostolic drumbeat, the very heartbeat of God, pulsing in His people’s steady march, is entrusted to us for transmission without improvisation to the next generation.

We have courage in Christ to keep our churches strong:

- pulsing with prayer and repentance;
- surging with service and sacrifice;
- living in liturgy and community; and
- existing for education and evangelism.

We have courage in Christ to keep our churches strong:

- not confused about biology, but constant in the Bible;
- not in conflict over rubrics and recipes, micro-tones and bureaucracies, but cooperating to share the medicine of immortality;
- not content with institutional survival, but confident in our Savior’s promises; and
- not comfortably numb, but crucified with Christ.

We have courage in Christ because He is

- with us, receiving our repentance;
- honoring our intentions;
- inspiring our virtue; and
- crowning our success!

We have courage in Christ because He is bearing with us the hatred and persecution of Satan and his servants as we stand for truth. Our people, especially or youth, need clear, truly Orthodox examples, instructions, and boundaries, regarding life, marriage, procreation, sexuality, gender, theology, and ecclesiology.

We have courage in Christ because He is with us, purifying, illumining, and deifying us in the sacraments and asceticism. We have courage in Christ because He is with us, *right now*, making this convention a turning point in our service to God, leading His people in a way of life that is pleasing to Him. We have courage in Christ, knowing that He has already conquered sin, the devil, and death. We *are* warriors, rightly rejoicing with the saints and angels at the victory banquet of Christ our Lord.

Stop the music a moment! The war may be won, but our duty isn’t done. What about our brothers, the fallen, the wounded, still embattled and captive? They need us. A closing question to haunt us: I know we have courage in Christ but do I – *you* – do *we* have enough love for Christ to return to the bloody battlefield with the good news of His victory?

To Him be all glory forever and ever.

Archpriest Noah Bushelli
St. Philip Church, Souderton, Pennsylvania



ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA
OFFICE OF PLANNING, POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Acts 11:26

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH ATTENDS STATE DEPARTMENT SUMMIT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Top Left: His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH with U.S. Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo

Center Left: His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH with Alex Azar, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Human Services

Bottom Left: His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH attends the State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, July 2019

Top Right: State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, attended by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH

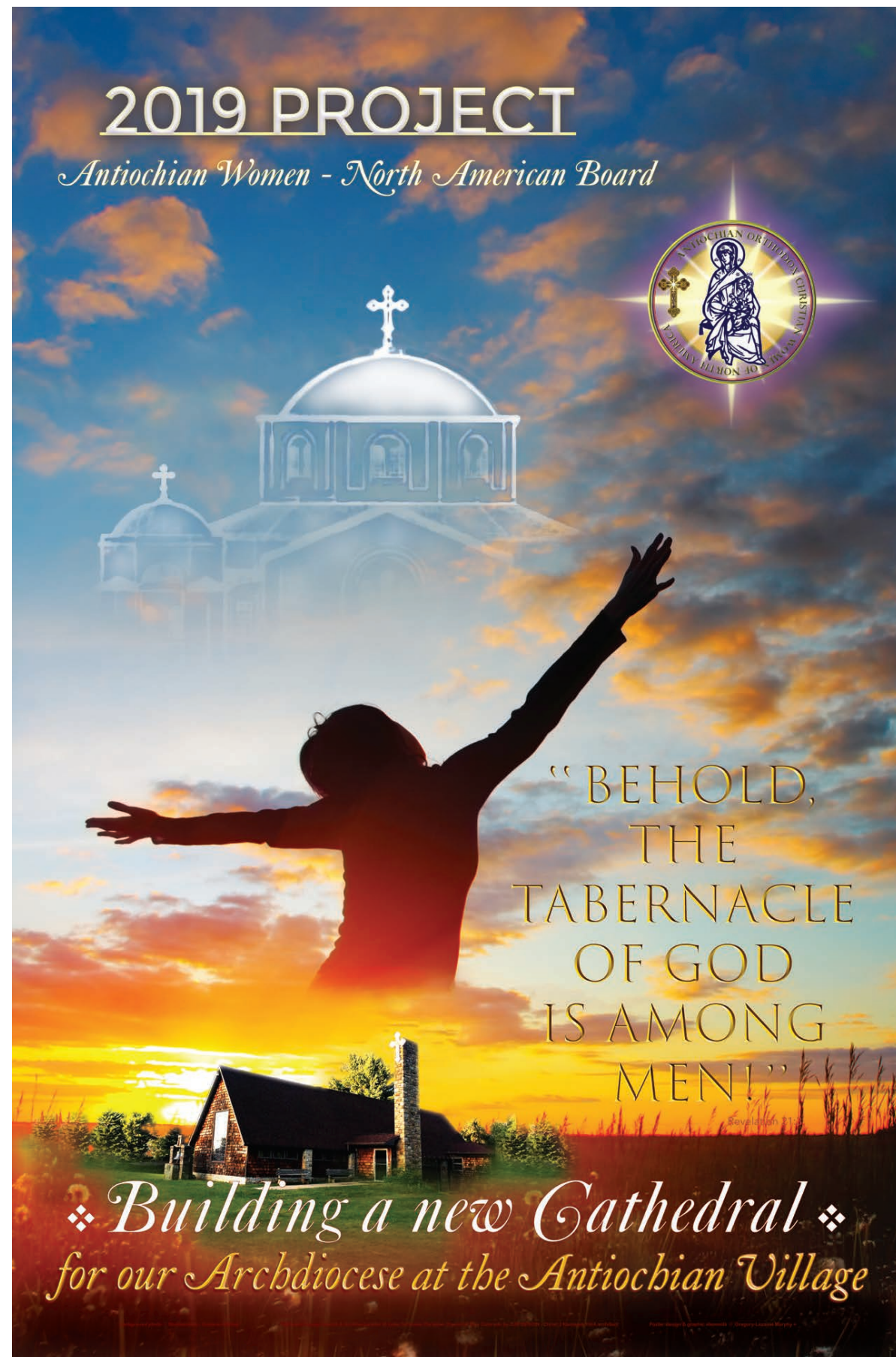
Bottom Right: Ambassador Sam Brownback addressing the attendees at the State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, attended by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH

In July of this year, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH was an honored guest at the State Department Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, hosted by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo in Washington, D.C.

Through this gathering, the State Department seeks to affirm international commitments to promote religious freedom for all, including persecuted Christians in the Middle East. There was a broad range of attendees, including over a thousand senior government representatives, religious leaders, and international organizations. This was one of the largest gatherings in the history of the State Department. Attendees met over a two-day period to identify concrete ways to combat religious persecution and discrimination, and to ensure greater respect for freedom of religion or belief.

During his time in Washington, His Eminence also had individual meetings with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Alex M. Azar II, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.





CARE FOR THE PLANET AND ALL CREATION: GOD’S FIRST MANDATE TO HUMANITY

DURING A CHURCH SCHOOL CLASS, DURING THE FUROR OVER THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PARIS CLIMATE ACCORD, ONE STUDENT ASKED IF, AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PLANET – SPECIFICALLY, DOING SOMETHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE. IT WAS AN HONEST QUESTION. UNFORTUNATELY, EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY HAS BECOME *THE* CHRISTIANITY REFERENCED AND PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA, AS THOUGH ALL CHRISTIANS BELIEVE WHAT THEY BELIEVE... WHICH WE DO NOT.

Most conservative evangelicals believe that, if climate change is really a problem, God will take care of it Himself; that He will not allow His creation to be destroyed. (See https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/06/02/why-dont-christian-conservatives-worry-about-climate-change-god/?utm_term=.cb2b12bf3097). Thus, some get the idea that Christians are not concerned with climate change. As with many other areas of theology, this shows that these evangelicals really don’t know the Bible, because nothing can be further from the truth.

Before Abraham, before Noah, before the commandment concerning the Fruit of the Tree, at the very time of our creation, God gave humanity its first mandate: “*Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over...*”

(*Genesis 1:26–28*). The term *dominion*, together with the phrase “*fill the earth and subdue it*,” has for centuries – especially in the Industrial Age – been interpreted by some to mean ‘control,’ ‘ownership,’ ‘mastery,’ and so on. It has been thought that the earth is here for us to do with as we please. The result of this mindset? Species driven to unnatural extinction, artificial/mutant species like “killer bees,” over-farming which lead to the 1930s Dust Bowl, destroyed ecosystems, “killer smog” in Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948 and London in 1952, and climate change. This year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the catching fire of Cleveland’s Cuyahoga River, an event that finally started people thinking about



what we are doing to the planet. During the same period, on the legendary variety show *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, a faux news scroll on the screen announced that water had been discovered under Lake Erie, a reference to the Lake's cesspool condition at the time.

Had God truly reserved care for creation to Himself, would He have allowed us to cause all the damage – some irreparable, some fixable – we already have? Probably not. Or would He have, at least, mystically cleaned it all up? Definitely. But it was and is *our* responsibility and we abused it and continue to abuse it! It's *our* mess to clean up... with His help! Just as a parent forces their child (who's old enough to know better) who has recklessly broken something to deal with the consequences; so God the Father does the same with us, His children.

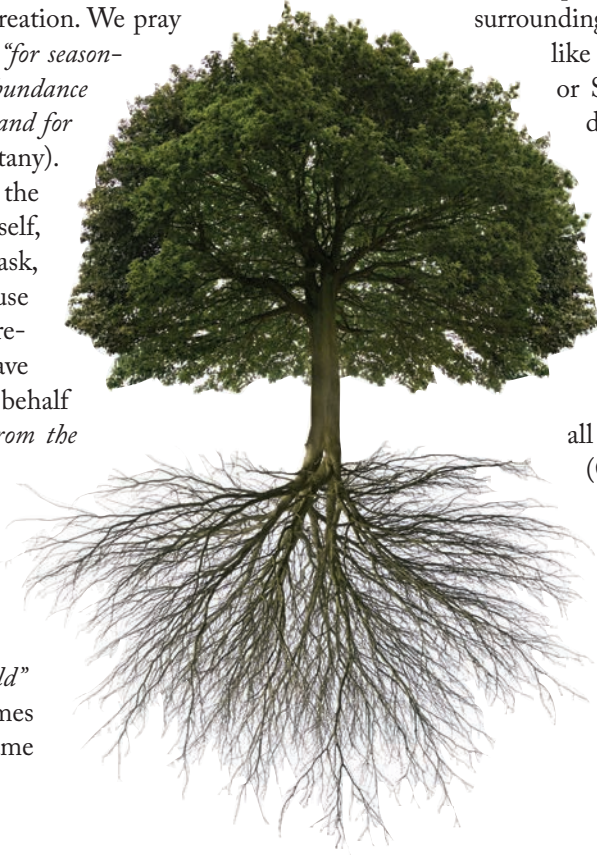
'Dominion' doesn't mean 'control', it means 'stewardship', it is our realm or area of responsibility; a concept pre-Industrial-Age humanity understood, and which traditional cultures, such as the Native Americans, still do. The consensus of the Church Fathers interprets the quote given above not only in terms of procreation, but also in terms of creation itself: *"Be fruitful and multiply (in the fruits of the Spirit), fill the earth (with the word of God) and subdue it (to His will),"* That puts a *very* different spin on things, doesn't it? This is the Orthodox Christian view of creation. We pray at nearly every service, *"for seasonable weather, for the abundance of the fruits of the earth and for peaceful times"* (Great Litany). If God had reserved the care of creation to Himself, we wouldn't have to ask, He'd just do it. Because we are responsible for creation, however, *we* have to ask for His help on behalf of creation. *"Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord Who makes the storm clouds, Who gives men showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field"* (Zechariah 10:1; cf. James 5:17–18). At the same

time, we have to do things on our own to help keep creation healthy. As the holy Apostle James said in his Epistle: *"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"* (James 2:15–16). It is not enough to pray; we must also act. Laws can only go so far; what we do in our daily lives matters much more. God will help us, but the responsibility is ours. Therefore, it is every Orthodox Christians' sacred obligation to care for creation and do what he or she can to mitigate, and, if possible, undo, the damage our ancestors have done and we continue to do.

We are allowed to make use of creation (Genesis 2:16, 9:3; Ps. 103/104:14–15), but it must be in a sustainable, non-destructive, humane, eco-friendly way, one that benefits creation and not just human beings. We show our love for God by showing our loving care for His creation ... all of it. Many of our monasteries are examples of this in action, raising sheep for weaving (Holy Myrrhbearers, New York), bees for honey and candles (St. John of San Francisco, California), olives for olive oil (St. Paisius, Arizona), making organic house-hold products (St. Xenia, Missouri). Some do similar things the same way, including subsistence living (St. Nilus, Alaska), all in pristinely maintained natural

surroundings which allow one to feel like St. Sergius (in the woods) or St. Mary of Egypt (in the desert), as though one is in the wilderness. Some provide walking paths with shrines to enhance the experience (Dormition, Michigan, and St. Tikhon, Pennsylvania). God promised He would never again destroy all life or flood the earth (Genesis 8:21, 9:11). If it happens again, it will be at our own hands.

Reader Daniel Manzuk
St. Mary's Cathedral (OCA),
Minneapolis



LIVING THE LITURGY - A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

Gregory Abdalah

PART 2 OF 10

Though we may go to a building in our city or a neighboring city when we go to church, something happens. As people, created in the image and after the likeness of God, the community formed within the Divine Liturgy becomes the backbone for our other communities. The Liturgy teaches us, guides us, and forms us. When we gather, we join with other communities who are gathered, grafting ourselves to one another within the Body of Christ. We are called out of the world in which we live and work every day, into an alternate reality, so that, having joined the Body of Christ, we might be transformed.

The Divine Liturgy begins with the words "Blessed is the Kingdom..." recognizing that when we gather together, we join with the angels standing before the Throne of God, praising Him. Everything in the church is designed to remind us that we are standing in God's presence. We stand in front of a throne and we bow, just like we would bow before a king. We have icons, which we call "windows into heaven," reminding us that we join the Saints who are present with us in the Kingdom, supporting us, and praising God with us. The architecture, the music, the incense, and even the priest's vestments, all call us into an alternate reality, where something big is happening.

We begin with the words, "Blessed is the Kingdom," a reminder that we enter into God's Kingdom, His time, and stand before His throne. In the ancient times, when someone was given a chance to meet the king, they would come and stand before his throne, and humbly ask him for what they need. We see this in movies and on TV all that time. We do the same thing, though we don't always look at it this way. We say some petitions, asking God to help us. We ask for all kinds of things: for the peace of the whole world, for the churches of God, for our bishops and all the clergy, and for the leaders of our country. We pray for the environment, that the seasons will be as they should be, and that we

have the food we need. In our last petition, we pray for ourselves, asking God to "help us, save us, and have mercy on us." After all that, we remember the Theotokos and all the saints, setting them before God as intercessors on our behalf. In other words, we ask them to put in a good word for us. Finally, we recognize that God is a good God, and that He loves us. We seem to be asking for a lot, which is why we keep repeating, "Lord, have mercy." Following the opening ektenia, we ask the Theotokos to pray for us, and then we ask Christ, the Son of God, who is Only-begotten, to save us. After all that, we "enter" into the Church. In the early days, the liturgy began with a procession through the city. The Gospel book was carried throughout the town and, once they got to the front door of the church, the deacon would hold up the Gospel book and say, "Wisdom! Let us attend!" Everyone would then sing, "Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ ..." and then enter the church together. We see the last remnants of this when we see a bishop serve. The bishop does not enter the altar until after the singing of the Entrance Hymn – "Come, let us worship."

This hymn, "Come, let us worship," is an invitation. There is a comma after the word come. We are invited to be a part of the community gathered together to worship God, and we have the choice to respond with "OK!" or "no way!" If we say "OK!" we belong to a community that is God's, and ultimately we belong to God. We are His. We often don't think of community in this way, but it's inherent in the language that we use. What does it mean to be members of the Body of Christ?

We say: "I belong to the football team"; "I belong to the math league"; "I belong to the YMCA"; and so on. If I belong to something, does that thing own me? What does this mean when we start talking about social media and those communities? We'll look at this next month.

Gregory Abdalah, D.Min.

Come, let us worship

PRAY, FAST, GIVE

Maria Koropsak

Very Reverend Father Charles Baz led a retreat for Antiochian Women from the Eastern Dioceses (New York and Washington, D.C., Diocese, and Oakland, Charleston and-Mid Atlantic Diocese), March 28–30.

The topic for our Lenten retreat was “Pray, Fast, Give,” and Father Charles Baz was our leader. The liturgies, the Akathist, Vespers, Orthros, and learning from Father Charles’ teaching, all refreshed us.

The retreat started off on Friday, March 29, 2019, with the beautiful Akathist to the Mother of God Service. I learned the following about the Akathist from Hieromonk Job Gumerov: this service was written in honor of the Mother of God, and was sung standing all night, from Friday to Saturday of the fifth week of Great Lent, after the Orthodox victory over the Persians and Avars, under Shah Hosroes Sarvar, who attacked Constantinople in 626 A.D. The imperial city had been surrounded by sea and by land. The situation was hopeless. The Mother of God gave her miraculous help and the city was saved. Out of thanksgiving for this intercession the feast of the Laudation of the Most Pure Mother of God (Saturday Akathist) was instituted. The word *rejoice*, heard repeatedly in the service, is taken from the Gospels. This is how the Archangel Gabriel greeted the Mother of God when he announced that the Messiah who would be born of her: “*Rejoice*, Thou are full of grace! The Lord is with Thee. Blessed are thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

After dinner, we watched a wonderful movie called “Life is Beautiful,” an incredibly moving story about love, family and the greatest love anyone can give. Jesus said “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). This set the tone for our retreat. We know that the greatest love in history is the love our Lord Jesus Christ showed in laying down his life for the salvation of the world. His love drives us to the three Lenten pillars of *praying, fasting, and giving*.

After the movie Friday evening, we gathered in the lobby and Rula Khoury (our AWE President)

demonstrated how to make the *koliva* for Saturday’s Memorial service. It was a unique experience for many of us new to the Orthodox faith. Koliva is made for memorials for the departed. The main ingredient, wheat, brings to mind the quote from John’s Gospel: “Unless a wheat of grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24).

Andrew Athanasiou’s article explains our tradition beautifully:

Koliva is boiled wheat with (depending on the recipe) a combination of some or all of the following ingredients: powdered sugar, almonds, ground walnuts, sesame seeds, cinnamon, pomegranate seeds, raisins, anise, parsley and more.

As Orthodox Christians we are awaiting the Second Coming and the General Resurrection of the dead, through Christ we have Life! But, remembering the memory of our deceased beloved ones is an opportunity to pray for the souls of the departed as well as a way to help us heal from the death.

Koliva is an important part for the beginning of Lent. The first Saturday of Lent and the previous two Saturdays leading up to it are called the Saturdays of the Souls. Saturday, year round, is a remembrance of the dead, but these particular Saturdays the remembrance is intensified. According to tradition, Koliva is connected to Lent because of a miracle from St. Theodore the Tyro. In the 4th Century AD, Emperor Julian the Apostate knew that Christians would be hungry after the first week of strict fasting, which would make them go to the markets in Constantinople to buy food. Emperor Julian ordered blood from pagan sacrifices to be sprinkled on the food that was sold there, trying to force the Christians to



paganism. St. Theodore the Tyro, who had died in the early 300’s, appeared to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Eudoxios, in a dream, telling him that Christians should just boil wheat from their homes and sweeten it with honey, to avoid the polluted foods at the market.

Saturday morning, we had Divine Liturgy for Soul Saturday. As explained in the article, during this Liturgy we commemorate our hierarchs and loved ones departed from this life.

Sunday morning started with Orthros and Divine Liturgy (the Third Sunday of Lent) This was followed by the Procession of the Holy Cross, a beautiful veneration of the Holy Cross of our Lord.

Father Charles noted that his teachings were drawn from the teachings of Father Thomas Hopko of blessed memory. Here are some of the things he said that truly resonated with me. The three pillars of the Great Fast of our Holy Orthodox Faith are outlined by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1–20):

- *We pray to God.*
- *We fast for ourselves.*
- *We give to others.*

To truly participate in Pascha, we must diligently prepare by praying, fasting, and almsgiving. The Orthodox Church is the Church of the Resurrection. Our ultimate goal is the resurrection. Jesus is the only basis for “resurrection, life and hope.”

On fasting, we read in Matthew’s Gospel,

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that

you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (6:16–18).

Fr. Charles, relying on St. Basil the Great, noted that “fasting is not abstaining from food only, but also abstaining from sin. Fasting is the accuser of sin, and the advocate of repentance, and the life worthy of angels and the salvation of humans.”

Fr. Charles observed that Adam and Eve were exiled from Paradise because of their disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. When Adam and Eve ate, they surely died. Death entered into the world and they were separated from God and all their descendants, the entire human race. Their transgression entered into the human race by their mouths. As they were expelled from Paradise by the action of eating, we are invited back into Paradise by the action of eating, in the Holy Eucharist, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. During the Great Fast we train and discipline our mouths both ways; by what we eat and by what we say.

The Great Fast should be a joyous time. After a weary winter, we look forward in anticipation to the coming of spring. As we journey through the blessed struggle of the Great Fast, we anticipate the joy of Pascha.

On prayer, we hear the following from our Lord:

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret

will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him (Matthew 6:5–8).

To abstain from certain foods without an increased prayer life and doing charitable works (almsgiving) is futile.

Father Charles made the following points:

- Prayer is communication and communion with God.
- The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was a man of prayer.
- The Lord instructs us and teaches us to pray.
- Whenever the disciples were in trouble or at a loss, Jesus was praying.
- Every righteous person, male or female, in the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testament, prayed.
- The Saints in heaven are in a continual state of prayer: We pray through them and they pray for us.
- We are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Father went on to teach about the two forms of prayer: the communal, or community, prayers – the Church; and personal or devotional prayer – the individual in private. Both are important for the spiritual life. Father Charles explained that “you” is sometimes singular and sometimes plural in Matthew 6:5–8 and in the Lord’s Prayer; the singular “you” applies to devotional prayer, and the plural “you” to communal prayer.

The Lord says this about almsgiving:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matthew 6:1–4).

St. John Chrysostom writes, “Almsgiving is greater than all virtues. It places its lovers by the side of the King Himself, and justly,” and, “feeding a hungry person is better than raising someone from the dead.” The Greek word means “act of mercy.”

We read in Matthew 25: 34–36, 40:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me ...

And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”

Fr. Charles noted that it is the only thing God will judge us for in the Last Judgement, hence, the Gospel reading of Meatfare Sunday (Matthew 25:31–46). He pointed out that “your salvation could be contained in that little 3x3-inch donation box of Food for Hungry People.”

Father Charles concluded by saying that Orthodoxy is above all the Church of the Resurrection, for its very foundation is the Risen Christ, and He is the only basis for Christian existence, life and hope. Unfortunately, many of our people do not fully experience the profound joy of Pascha. This is because they fail to embrace fully a necessary time of preparation. For without an ‘expectant preparation’ the deeper meaning of Pascha is lost.

The teaching of Father Charles brought about a deeper, spiritual understanding of the beautiful disciplines of our Holy Orthodox faith, as he brought together the meaning of these disciplines and the reason why Mother Church gives them to us. They are passed on for the health of our souls, so that we may know how to prepare in anticipation for the joyous moment when we meet the Lord in the ultimate, eternal Pascha in the heavenly kingdom.

All Glory be to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – The Blessed Holy Trinity!

Maria Koropsak
Religious Coordinator, Antiochian Women of the East

TOWARDS A VISION OF THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF YOUTH

THIS DOCUMENT IS INTENDED TO BE USED AS A GUIDE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFIED VISION OF ORTHODOX YOUTH SPIRITUAL FORMATION BY THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (“ASSEMBLY”). IT IS NOT A FINAL STATEMENT OR DECISIVE ROADMAP FOR ACHIEVING THE VISION. INSTEAD, IT IS AN OPENING OF A DISCUSSION ON HOW BEST TO DEVELOP AND ENACT A VISION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION. WE NOTE THAT EACH JURISDICTION IS BEGINNING TO MAKE HEADWAY IN DEVELOPING A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO ORTHODOX YOUTH SPIRITUAL FORMATION FROM BOTH THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES.



The Committee for Youth (“the Committee”) has drafted several initial attempts to define Orthodox youth spiritual formation. These papers can be accessed at <http://www.orthodoxyouth.net/youth-workers/formation>. This document summarizes those papers and is designed to present both a rationale for acting, and actionable steps and recommendations for furthering this work in a unified manner.

RATIONALE

The disturbing trend of young people leaving the Church as they enter adulthood has been well docu-

mented. While there have been significant efforts to minister to youth during their teen years, as well as during college, the question remains, “What distinguishes those who remain involved in the Church from those who reject the Church, either outright, or simply by drifting away?” Although there may be any number of contributing factors, at the most basic level, the response often depends on whether or not the young person has a living, experiential relationship with Christ. Current American culture presents a unique set of challenges to youth formation that cannot be sufficiently addressed by trying to



replicate models of Orthodox youth spiritual formation that have been successful in other historical and geographic Orthodox contexts. We do not live in an Orthodox-majority country, and only rarely live in tightly knit, Orthodox-minority communities.

Within the North American context, there is a great deal of diversity among Orthodox communities, that results in a broad range of models of Orthodox youth spiritual formation. In the past, many of our Orthodox communities have relied on Western Christian approaches for youth formation that are not Orthodox in their ethos or praxis. These past approaches have had varying levels of success and theological consistency. The challenges that the American context presents for supporting our youth require a distinctly Orthodox approach that attends to the particularities of this context, and which can be applied and adapted across Orthodox communities in America. It is not enough to be Orthodox by heritage, to know the teachings and practices of the Faith, or to participate in youth ministry organizations. To remain steadfast, the young Orthodox Christian on the threshold of adulthood must have come to know Christ very early in his or her life, even from birth. Consequently, there is an essential need for the members of the Assembly purposefully to develop a vision of the spiritual formation of Orthodox youth, and to support it.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS

- 1. to begin to define what is meant by Orthodox youth spiritual formation, and to affirm the principles which underlie it;
- 2. to outline practical steps the Church might take to support the work of Orthodox youth

- spiritual formation; and
- 3. to provide recommendations on ways in which the Assembly might move forward to discuss our approach to Orthodox youth spiritual formation, and how we might restructure it.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are guided by four key principles:

- 1. A vision of Orthodox youth spiritual formation must be theologically Orthodox. Its development and enactment need to reflect Orthodox Christianity specifically, and not simply be borrowed and repurposed from other groups.
- 2. Orthodox youth spiritual formation is not a singular event or activity, nor is it an individual program. Rather, it is a continuous and unified integration of our youth within the life of the Church. It is supported not only by parents, clergy, and youth ministers, but also through the entire body of the Church, on a daily basis and in all that we do.
- 3. Orthodox youth spiritual formation must develop the faith, knowledge, and skills of our youth to engage the world around them, to the glory of God.
- 4. Orthodox youth spiritual formation must include the home and, more importantly, parents. In many homes, parents may be no closer to a relationship with Christ than their children. Orthodox youth spiritual formation, therefore, must encompass the entire family.
- 5. A vision of Orthodox youth spiritual formation must be accessible to all members of the Church. It needs to be communicated in a language our youth can understand and be adaptable to the

diverse circumstances in which our youth live. What Is Orthodox Youth Spiritual Formation?

Orthodox youth spiritual formation is, broadly speaking, the growth in spiritual maturity among our young people that enables them to see themselves in Christ, and to see Christ at work in them.¹ As we consider both the potential that our young people have in Christ, and the spiritual dangers that confront them, we are committed to building up young people as members of the Body of Christ.

PRACTICAL STEPS the Church Can Take to Support the Work of Orthodox Youth Spiritual Formation

- 1. To truly care about the salvation of our youth, and really seek to form them as children of God – as disciples and leaders of the Church – we must take seriously that we are raising up a generation of disciples and leaders for Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church.
- 2. We must actively invest in the development not just of our youth, but of those ministering and supporting our youth. This includes clergy, families, youth workers, religious education instructors, and anyone else directly involved in forming our youth.
- 3. We can develop accessible resources that are connected across ages, jurisdictions, and programs, and that appropriately support formation of our youth. Our methods of teaching need to become “cutting edge,” and at the same time bring with them the timeless wisdom of the Church.
- 4. We can promote the spiritual growth of the Church overall, and foster opportunities for youth to learn from the witness of Orthodoxy in the lives of others.
- 5. We can regularly experience the active involvement of our bishops in the daily lives of our churches.

BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Ultimately, the Church in America needs to gather her bishops, priests, and lay leaders on the archdiocesan and diocesan levels, and the parents, educators, youth workers, and young people to dive into the depths of Orthodoxy, and articulate anew – based on the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church,

the Divine Services, the Holy Fathers and Mothers throughout history, as well as this present day – a deliberate path forward in developing an Orthodox approach to Youth Formation. This approach, current and effective, will address the unique needs and circumstances of Orthodoxy in America. This dialogue and direction should help educate youth workers. It should present concrete material on ways in which form, deeply and broadly, the identity of our young people as children of the light, working out their salvation here in North America in the Twenty-First Century.

The Committee for Youth believes that new tools and approaches to Orthodox spiritual formation are crucially needed if we are to succeed in Christ’s call to pass on the message of salvation to our youth, and to help them enter into life with Christ.

Spiritual formation is not separate from youth ministry in general but is a broader description of what youth ministry has as its true aim. We fall short of the mark if we reduce youth spiritual formation to youth ministry programs. Orthodox youth spiritual formation should not be merely accidental. It should be a deliberate effort to transform lives and save souls. Our youth are either “conformed to this world,” or they are “transformed by the renewing” of their minds, which can only happen as Christ is formed in them.² Formation of our youth, as Saint John Chrysostom reflects³, is about choosing to be formed as a beautiful person from within. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.⁴) are essential in forming the identity of Children of God. Our task is to help form disciples who are beautiful in their identity and personhood before God and His people. It is also about developing in our youth the yearning for the very presence of the Lord – the yearning for the full establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven here and now – the yearning for the end of the nonsense of this fallen world and the restoration of the Kingdom in all places. Not in the sense of avoiding the world, but fully engaging the world as a citizen of the Kingdom.

1. “Working Document of Spiritual Formation,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Youth.
2. Rom. 12:2, Gal. 4:19.
3. John Chrysostom, “Homily II: Eutropius having been found outside the Church had been taken Captive,” Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 264.
4. Gal. 5:22, p.

STRENGTH THROUGH CHRIST

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival
for the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

Ellaney Matarese

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). I first read this verse in a T-shirt shop at my Junior Olympic track meet two years ago. Since then it has been one of my favorite passages of Scripture. I have competed in the junior Olympics several times and have come in second in the nation and tenth in the nation in different events. At these races, it's traditional for competitors to get T-shirts with inspirational quotes printed on them. I chose to put, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" on my T-shirt. At that time, I interpreted the passage to mean that God could help me to overcome the challenges I face, particularly the grueling race to the finish line, and through the pain of pushing past my previous physical limits. Now, however, I know it means so much more. Philippians 4:13 is significant in my own life because it empowers me to trust in God to overcome any challenge I may face, and to help others do the same. I know that I can release all my worries and trust in the Lord, finding peace and help from God in prayer.

Furthermore, this verse helps me to know that I have the ability, the strength, to live following Christ's example, and to inspire others to do the same. Finally, I am reminded that the Lord is always present and can help me if I simply turn to him.

Christ strengthens me through prayer by allowing me to let go of my anxiety and find peace. This idea is almost perfectly captured in Philippians 4:5-9, which reads, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Through alleviating my worry through prayer, I am strengthened by Christ, and given the ability to conquer what lies ahead of me. In the past I suffered with anxiety and OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder). I felt as though I were not truly in control of my own life; rather, the voice in my head was telling me what to do, and I was scared of what would happen if I did not comply. My fears were irrational, and deep down I knew this, but I didn't have the strength to fight on my own. I felt as though I was falling into a dark hole and, each time I tried to climb out, I fell down deeper. When I

felt as though there was no escape, I turned to God, to prayer, asking Him to give me strength. And although it was a long and difficult journey, I gained strength through prayer, and I was able to overcome my struggles stronger than before. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus tells His disciples, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." From this, we can see that Philippians 4:13 truly means that, through trust in God, one can endure and accomplish all things. God will relieve you of your worries when you don't know what to do. "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

When my brother was nine years old, he went to a running camp in Mammoth. He was running with his team on a trail in the mountains when he started to fall behind. When the group finished the run, they realized he was not with them and immediately started searching for him. After half an hour we still had not found him, and it was beginning



to get dark. My brother later told us he was terrified and had started to panic because he didn't know what to do. Finally, he decided to sit down and pray to God. He said in that moment he heard the faint sound of one of us calling out his name. In his moment of fear, he was able to turn to God and God helped him find his way home.

Another meaning of Philippians 4:13 is that Christ gives us the strength to live by His example, and the ability to inspire others to do the same. I try to do this in my own life, with the goal of making the world a better place. As a competitive athlete, it is easy to get caught up with the goal of winning, but whether I win or lose, I still try to be an example to others. Although it may seem unlikely, I have even become friends with my fiercest competitors; I am always sure to congratulate them after a great race. Whether I win or lose, I try to be a good example of sportsmanship, demonstrating the love of Christ. The more we love Christ, the more we can witness to His grace. While faith in itself is important, it doesn't mean anything without us living the right way, too. We should live our lives following Christ's example, trying to do good in the world, and helping others and those in need. I have volunteered at Childrens Hospital, Los Angeles, and also earned my Girl Scout Gold Award planning and running a camp for the Boys and Girls Club of Monrovia. Helping children who are sick or who are in need has brought me great joy. I've learned you can do anything you put your mind to, but this means nothing unless you do it with love. "And although I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 14:5). When I am frustrated with my younger siblings or getting upset over something essentially unimportant, I pray to God to give me strength to be the bigger person, to remember what is really important in life, and to be full of love. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ says "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feeds them...but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:25-33).

It is important to remember what is most important in the way you live your life, and not to get caught up in superficial or unimportant things. God gives us the strength to resist temptations and maintain our faith and love.

Numerous figures throughout Scriptures and extra-biblical sources were given the strength to make ultimate sacrifices for the sake of spreading God's word. For example, for her salvation St. Mary of Egypt was willing to spend 47 years in the desert in repentance. Not only was St. Athanasius exiled five times, and did he defend the Holy Trinity against Arianism (which denied the divinity of Christ), he struggled against emperors when the faith demanded it. On Holy Saturday we remember the three youths in the fire, who accepted a sentence to burn rather than deny their faith. Our Old Testament fathers were tortured, "had chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted were slain with the sword . . . And all these, having obtained a good testimony through the faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be perfect apart from us." We have to ask ourselves, if given the opportunity, would we do the same as the saints throughout history? This question is difficult to answer, but we must remember that Christ will give us the strength to do all things. God loves us so much that He will not abandon us, no matter what the challenge. We hope that we won't face many of the physical challenges of our forefathers, but the psychological and spiritual challenges of our modern world may be just as difficult. In each case, and in many ways, our lives and our actions preach the Gospel. As Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel; use words if necessary."

Lastly, Philippians 4:13 is significant in the sense that it reminds us that the Lord is always present; He is there for us when we turn to Him. In today's society, psychologists and "wellness advisors" have developed various methods and tools to help people deal with stress. One theory that is popular right now is "mindfulness," which is defined by dictionary.com as a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings and thoughts. Rather than simply focusing on being present ourselves, however, it is *so* much more powerful to focus on the fact that Christ is present with us. Christ is and always will be there to give us

strength when we need it: as He was for my brother when he was lost in the forest at dusk; as He was for me when I was struggling with anxiety; as He is for all of us when we struggle with the challenges of daily life. As in the “Footprints in the Sand” poem, Christ is there when we are most in need. In the poem, there are two sets of footprints in the sand, representing Christ always walking next to the author during the course of his life. The author of the poem asks Christ why, when at the times in his life when he was most in need, there is only one set of footprints on the sand. Did Christ abandon him then? Christ responds, “My precious child... during your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.” Christ is ever present with us and we just need to remember that and trust in Him.

While on the surface Philippians 4:13 may appear to be simple and straightforward, in reality there is so much meaning behind it. It shows us that through faith in God and prayer, we have the ability to conquer all of the challenges we face. Christ gives us the strength to live in His example and to be an example to others. Further, He will grant us the strength that He gave our forefathers, to make significant and even ultimate sacrifices for the sake of spreading God’s word. Finally, the passage reminds us that God is always present in our lives to help us. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. “Christ is in our midst!” Indeed, He is and ever shall be.

Ellaney Matarese
St. Michael Church, Van Nuys, California

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHOOSES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), the official college ministry for all twelve jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, has named Rev. Deacon Marek Simon as Executive Director. He will begin his tenure on September 16, 2019. Dn. Marek will be formally introduced to the dozens of student leaders attending OCF’s Summer Leadership Institute being held August 14–17 at the St. Iakovos Retreat Center in Kansasville, Wisconsin.

After graduating from St. Vladimir’s Seminary in 2001, Dn. Marek has been serving at Antiochian Village Camp since 2002, where he oversees the development and advancement efforts of the camp. He also serves as supervisor of the camp’s staff and manages its team-building ropes course program. During this time, Dn. Marek remained committed to campus ministry, serving as the advisor for OCF’s Student Leadership Board from 2005–2009.

“I first learned about the scope of OCF’s work in 2002, and now I am both excited and honored to focus my efforts in hopes of advancing the mission, vision, and goals of OCF,” said Dn. Marek, speaking of his long history and bright future with OCF.

“I am passionate about working with young people as they navigate their journey into adulthood, experience college, explore vocation, and seek to grow in their faith. I look forward to working with the staff of OCF, college students, clergy, lay leaders, and other Orthodox ministries to share the Good News of Christ throughout our college communities,” he added.

Deacon Marek’s hiring is a significant part of the growth and restructuring of the organization currently being conducted by OCF’s Board of Directors. “On behalf of our dedicated staff and the students we serve, I look forward to working with Dn. Marek as a colleague in realizing the Board’s vision of bringing Christ in His fullness to the college campus,” said Dn. Alexander Cadman, Board Chairman.

OCF transforms the lives of college students in the United States and Canada by guiding them along the path to Jesus Christ through His Church, cultivating a campus community of worship, witness, service, fellowship and education. You can learn more about the ongoing work of this vital ministry by visiting ocf.net or emailing info@ocf.net.

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION



ALL SAINTS CHURCH, SALINA, CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

The year 1994 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Orthodox missionaries on the North American continent. In the year of this bicentennial celebration there were many communities founded in the Archdiocese. One of these was All Saints Church in Salina, Kansas. His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory, gave them the name of “All Saints” so that they would have the “entire company of heaven” interceding as their patrons!

Like many new communities, planted where no other Orthodox parishes have been before, there have been peaks and lows in their history. In small communities, one or two moves or deaths can create real challenges. All Saints has been no exception to this pattern, but on All Saints Sunday 2019 there was a

true sense that fresh growth was on the vine, and many thanks were given for its founding and hopes expressed for its future.

As a parish, All Saints has brought forth several priestly vocations, men now serving the Archdiocese. There are also many people of various international backgrounds who have passed through the parish over these past 25 years. Many converts have been added to the household of faith, and many of these have been part of founding new communities in other areas of the country, including St. Mary Magdalene Church, Manhattan, Kansas. A fine former Air Force Base Chapel was quickly acquired and transformed into a beautiful Orthodox Church, and by God’s mercy the mortgage was burned earlier than expected.

Archpriest Chad Hatfield, the founding priest, now the President of St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York, returned to Salina for the anniversary, at which

he remarked on the beauty of the music that he said was “rare in smaller churches.” Their second priest, Archimandrite David Griffith, was unable to attend, but sent greetings. Priest Isaac Farha, now serving the parish, rejoiced that the spirit of renewal was so strong. It was noted that Fr. Isaac was once a parishioner during his college years, commuting fifty miles every Sunday from Concordia, Kansas.

Thanks were also expressed for the support given by St. George Cathedral and St. Mary Church, Wichita, Kansas, who were both like the “parents” of the new community: a parish founded by those who sought only to be part of the Church of the Apostles and who sacrificed much, without counting the cost.

ST. JAMES MISSION, BUFORD, GEORGIA WELCOMES BISHOP NICHOLAS

The weekend of June 1–2, 2019, was a momentous one for the parishioners of St. James Mission in Buford, Georgia. We were able to welcome our diocesan bishop, Bishop NICHOLAS, for his first pastoral visit to the community. There had been several scheduling problems during the previous eight months, but finally we were all able to accomplish it.

The congregation of St. James, which now numbers around ninety adults and children, had seen one previous hierarchical visit a few years earlier, when

Bishop ANTOUN came calling. Unfortunately, because of his illness at the time, His Grace was unable to serve. This time the community was treated to full-blown hierarchical Sunday services, challenging both choir and altar servers, most of whom are new to episcopal visitations!

Archpriest Steven Ritter, the parish pastor, was ably joined in concelebration by the Deacon of St. James, Anthony Bridges, and visiting Archpriests George Makhlof and Gregory Mathewes-Green. Fr. Gregory's attendance was made more meaningful, as his son David, whose family attends St. James, was elevated to the rank of Sub-deacon. Also tonsured to the degree of Reader was Joshua Freeman; his family are also longstanding members of the community.

The church, believed to be the last congregation started by Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory, back in 2013, currently resides in a rented warehouse, with hopes of acquiring property soon. His Grace's encouragement and spiritually uplifting conversations with the St. James membership were met with enthusiasm and a renewed desire to establish yet another outpost of the holy Orthodox faith in the Atlanta area. *Many years, O Master!*

Fr. Steven Ritter

FR. JOSEPH HUNEYCUTT CELEBRATES 25 YEARS A PRIEST

In addition to celebrating the major feast of Pentecost, our parish on Pentecost Sunday



celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Very Reverend Fr. Joseph Huneycutt's ordination. I was telling my thirteen-year-old son that the Huneycutt family was hosting coffee hour and offering roasted pig and the "fixin's" to the parish community. He responded, "Why is he serving us? We should be serving him." It's a great question, especially coming from an egocentric adolescent. So

why did Fr. Joseph and his family serve us? Quite simply, it was another example that they are living icons of Christ. Their serving us was a proclamation that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). May God grant Fr. Joseph and his family many years!

Christi Ghiz
St. Joseph Orthodox Church, Houston,
Texas



Inducted into the Order of St. Ignatius by Metropolitan JOSEPH on August 8, 2019, at St. Ignatius Church Franklin, Tennessee, were Mark Evinger, Knight; Melinda Evinger, Dame; Kurt Lytle, Knight; Matthew McElroy, Knight; Kip Perkins (upgrade) Knight Commander; Kristi Perkins (upgrade), Dame Commander; Angela Santana, Dame; and Mark Santana, Knight.

BISHOP ALEXANDER ORDAINS NEW DEACON AT ST. ELIAS, OTTAWA

On the Third Sunday of Great Lent, March 31, 2019, His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER visited St. Elias Cathedral in Ottawa, Canada and, with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, ordained Gilbert Daoura, a parishioner of St. Elias, to the holy diaconate. The new Deacon received the name Yakoub (Jacob) after the Hieromartyr Jacob of Hama-toura. The Cathedral's Dean and Pastor, Archpriest Ghattas Hajal,

alongside the Assistant Pastor Fr. Nektarios Najjar, assisted His Grace in the service.

Deacon Yakoub is married and has one daughter. Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, he graduated with a degree in Business and Computer studies from the Lebanese University, and currently works at the University of Ottawa. With his wife Caty and daughter Lea, he moved to Ottawa in 2011. They have been active since in the parish life of St. Elias Cathedral.

The parish held a reception in the Church hall immediately after the service to celebrate the ordination, and all the parishio-

ners had a chance to congratulate him, his wife Caty and daughter Lea, and to wish him a long and blessed ministry in Christ's vineyard.

We pray that the Lord may grant the new deacon and his family many years of holiness, that he may be a fruitful servant of Christ's ministry at the parish of St. Elias and the in city of Ottawa. Axios!

ST. MARY, PAWTUCKET, WELCOMES NEW SUB-DEACON

St. Mary Church, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, has a new sub-deacon! On Great and Holy Saturday, April 27, with His Grace Bishop JOHN presiding, Elijah (Porphyrios) Vollen-dorf was tonsured Sub-deacon at St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Sub-deacon Elijah had previously been serving alongside Father Elie Estephan as an altar server. Now the congregation at St. Mary is happy to call him Sub-deacon.

In addition to serving behind the altar, Elijah has been a Sunday School teacher and Teen SOYO adviser. "Elijah's knowledge about Orthodoxy and excitement to teach Sunday School each week is quite outstanding," said Sunday School student, Nicole Balbaaki. "He is always there for the teens, along with all of St. Mary's students! Elijah is very humble, patient, dedicated, and hard-working, and his dedication to the Orthodox Church reminds me of God's work in the world." Elijah is also the leader of the parish's pledge program, and



Aleksei Korobovskiy, age 9, a Cub Scout with Pack 99 and an altar server at St. George, South Glens Falls, New York, earned the St. George Medal from the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting (EOCS) on June 23, 2019. Fr. Gregory Potter, his pastor and award counselor, presented him with his award.

has helped revamp St. Mary’s use of technology, including their website, directory, calendar, social media, and a tailor-made mobile app that combines these and other features into one, convenient platform.

Elijah and his wife, Andrea, first came to Pawtucket in 2017 from Orlando, Florida. Both work in the tech industry, but have also managed to find ample time and energy for the Church. “I am grateful for the opportunity to give my time to our parish and the Orthodox Church. St. Mary is my home,” said Sub-deacon Elijah.

All others who call St. Mary home are very glad to share their spiritual abode with Elijah and Andrea. “Elijah and Andrea are very involved in the life of our community and we are so blessed to have them,” said Fr. Elie. “We congratulate Elijah and ourselves for his tonsure, and may God continue to guide him into the path of the diaconate.”

In addition to Sub-deacon Elijah’s tonsuring, on Great and Holy Saturday St. Mary also welcomed two new members into the Orthodox faith – Samira and her son. “We congratulate them and the St. Mary family for God’s blessings in growing in His service under the guidance of our Bishop JOHN,” said Fr. Elie.

BISHOP JOHN
ORDAINS PRIEST TO
SERVE ST. COLUMBA,
LAFAYETTE

The Western Rite Vicariate was blessed with the ordination, in August, of Fr. David McCready, who takes over from Fr. Lester Bundy as Pastor of St.



Columba’s, Lafayette, Colorado. His Grace Bishop JOHN performed the ordination on Sunday, August 11. The day before, His Grace had presided over a double celebration at the Monastery of Our Lady, and St. Lawrence in Canyon City, Colorado. In the morning, High Mass was served by Abbot Theodore in the presence of a relic of St. Lawrence which had been received at Vespers the evening before. In the afternoon His Grace dedicated a new mausoleum, the altar of which is adorned by a number of icons. The central two depict St. Gregory the Dialogist and St. Basil the Great, picked because of the liturgies they composed and a reminder of the unity of the East and West in the patristic period, when the one Orthodox faith was expressed in a diversity of rites. It is such unity-in-diversity that the Archdiocese has recreated with the Western Rite Vicariate.

Because of our unity, East and West often share the same liturgical feasts. For example, in August we both keep the Dormition of the Theotokos and the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner. At other times, however, there are differences, as when in September the Western Rite keeps the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday

after the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross as what are called “Ember Days.” These days are very ancient, well-established before the time of the schism, probably in the Fourth Century, during the pontificate of St. Siricius. Originally, the days were designed to sanctify the four seasons of the year, whence their Latin name, *quatuor tempora*. (The designation *Ember* dates from the Seventh Century, when the Roman rite was brought to England by St. Augustine of Canterbury, and given the Anglo-Saxon name of *imbrun*, meaning “re-occurring” – the days re-occur throughout the year.) The September Ember Days sanctify the season of fall, and are connected to the grape-harvest, which took place in Rome around this time. Scripture often speaks of the Church’s ministry in agricultural terms – for example, toiling in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). So it was only natural that the Ember Days became connected with ordinations, something which dates from the Fifth Century and the time of Pope St. Gelasius.



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We are excited to announce that the St. Athanasius Academy is now offering online Orthodox studies for homeschooling families. For grades 6 to 8, we are offering
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Classes begin next month, so check out the details now at www.saaot.edu. Please share this information with all homeschooling families.

Fr. John Finley

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A TABLE IN THE PRESENCE

RETREAT FOR ORTHODOX COMBAT VETERANS



Orthodox Christian combat veterans of OEF and OIF:

The dust remains on your boots and in your rucksacks.

Your fallen brothers remain in your hearts and minds.

Combat is a threshold that cannot be uncrossed.

Your stories are not easy to tell. Who can bear them?

**BUT GOD KNOWS THEM ALL.
AND HIS LOVE FOR YOU ENDURES FOREVER.**

*Your Orthodox Military Chaplains
and some veteran clergy have planned a retreat.*

No cost – just get to us, if you can. We'll take care of the rest.

**WE GATHER TO TALK. WE GATHER TO PRAY.
TO STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AND TO FACE GOD.**

Columbus Day Weekend 2019 at the Antiochian Village

Funding provided by the Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch
To register, contact Barli Ross at barli@antiochianvillage.org