

# THE WORD

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## CALLED TO SERVE



# 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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# STEP FORWARD AND SERVE

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH



“We’re looking for a few good men” – this is a slogan employed by the United States Marine Corps for many years as part of its recruitment efforts. It might apply just as well to the Church’s millennia-long search for clergy. Like the Marines, the bishops, priests,

and deacons who serve our Archdiocese are on the frontlines of a battle, but “our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). They fight the lies, distortions, temptations, and misplaced values that the devil uses to hold humanity captive. They defend the community of the faithful, which the Lord has established as a beachhead of spiritual freedom and brotherly love in this sin-ravaged world. Like the best soldiers, they bring honor to the Church through their heroic and faithful service.

When our Lord Jesus Christ began His earthly ministry, one of the first things He did was to gather the twelve disciples and train them to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). These, in turn, made a priority of prayerfully identifying leaders to continue the ministry in each city and town. The ministry of the Gospel encompasses all the faithful and has many aspects, including serving, teaching, offering praise to God, healing, hospitality, raising the young, and supporting the aged. The work of the Church includes a host of callings, including monastics, chaplains, youth directors, pastoral assistants, musicians, administrators, and artists. In the midst of this beautiful diversity of ministries, the clergy provide an essential service in guiding and empowering the other members of the Body of Christ. This calling of the clergy, like the many other callings in the Church, is a mysterious synergy between the Holy Spirit and

the Body of Christ. On one hand, the Spirit stirs the heart of the individual and provides the needed gifts, and on the other, the Body of Christ confirms the individual’s calling and sharpens those gifts for effective use. Just as then, so today we need men who, when they hear the call of Christ, are willing to step forward and take up the struggle of priestly ministry. We also need men and women throughout the Church to take seriously their callings in Christ and invest themselves fully in the work of the Church.

Our Orthodox Christian seminaries are an essential resource in this process of cultivating future ministers in the Church – both for the priesthood and for other kinds of ministry. They offer in-depth education, not just in Scripture and theology, but also in practical disciplines like chanting, preaching, counseling, and administration. Most students in seminary are studying in preparation for the priesthood, but some are preparing to serve as teachers, chaplains, youth workers, iconographers, or church musicians. In this issue of *The WORD*, you will read stories of men and women who are studying at seminary, in response to God’s calling. You will read about several men who are perhaps on their way to be ordained. You will also read about men and women seeking to offer their lives and service to Christ and the Church through some other ministry.

I hope that, as you read, you will reflect on your own calling to ministry in the Church. I also hope you will think about your children, friends, and fellow parishioners, and whether you see in them some special calling that you can encourage and support. In particular, I pray that you will help us identify young men in your own family or parish who might be called to the priesthood; pray for them and offer them whatever support you can. Year after year, we’re looking for a few good men to step forward and offer themselves to this service, which, as St. John Chrysostom says, “is performed on earth but ranks among heavenly offices.” We need your help to find them.

# GETTING TO KNOW OUR SEMINARIANS

The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend  
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend  
Bishop NICHOLAS

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by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)  
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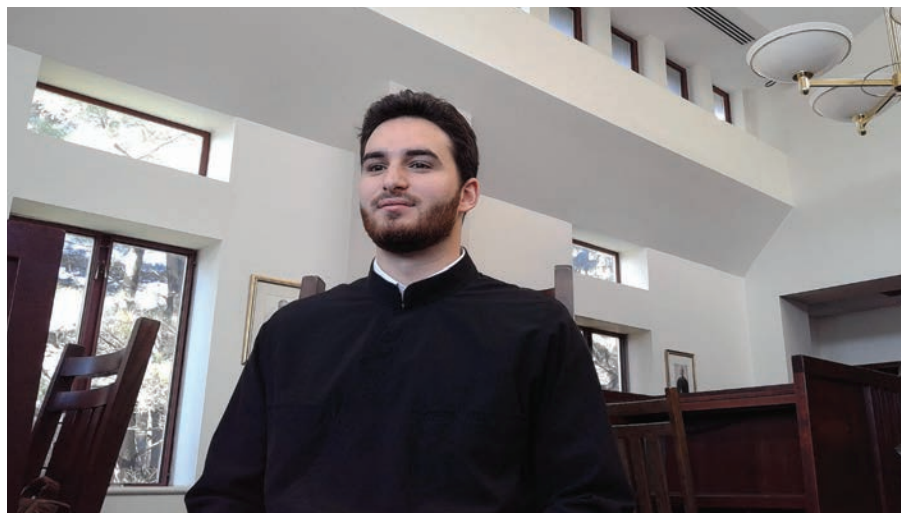
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JACK CORBIN

I come from a typical Orthodox family, a big family of people for whom the Church is important. I am 25, the youngest of three boys, and I grew up in Garden Grove, California. I have two brothers to look up to, as well as lots of older cousins, aunts, and uncles. All of them are active in our Church.

Before seminary I studied business, with an emphasis on human resources. After graduation I worked a little bit as a sales recruiter. I left that job shortly before Covid. I was unemployed for almost a year.

My earliest remembrance of God was praying daily with my family. I think that within the Church my earliest memory was with Fr. Michael Lewis of blessed memory. I was an altar boy. He showed interest in me, teaching me how to do confession. Those were my earliest memories. I knew that I was a Christian and that there is a God whom it was right for me to seek after.

It wasn't really until college that I felt called to serve as a priest. It was something I had thought about before, but it wasn't until late college that I allowed myself to think about it seriously. At some level I knew that it was what I wanted to do someday, though I didn't fully realize it. Covid happened, however, and I was ready and available, so I decided to go then. I took that opportunity, and I thank God that I did.

Bishop JOHN helped me discern my way when I talked to him about it. My parents were very supportive, and they saw it for me as well. The camping programs and youth programs of the Church had given me lots of opportunities to lead. I had many mentors, who all pointed me in this direction, some more explicitly than others. I took it all seriously.

Seminary life at St. Vladimir's has been a unique experience. Everyone here is striving for similar things. The community all praying, studying, and working together has been very helpful. Everyone cares for you here. I experienced a little bit of this at camp, but seminary takes it to an all-new level. Being with dedicated families, spending time in community, and learning within the community has been very fulfilling. The length of time spent together, in and out of liturgy, learning from



the other students as well as the professors, has been so valuable.

Seminary has changed me. It's not easy. It's not what I thought it would be. The idea of coming and being in Church all the time, studying things I love, was very romantic for me, but while I was here I realized I faced a challenge. There is always something working against you, and at times you need to fight against it. It has made me more thoughtful, and challenged my ideas of being a Christian. This makes me grow. It made me think about why I am here and why I care. These questions made me face myself and think more deeply. It has given me answers and has allowed me to help others as well, because seminary has made me more thoughtful and questioning. Discovering that other people have similar thoughts has been very helpful, and I wrestle with questions every day.

What I think the Church needs most is dedicated people. They don't need to be perfect or "holy." I think the Church needs dedicated people. From my perspective as a young person, not far from my teen years and college, it was the dedicated people who were the examples for me. It wasn't something I heard on YouTube that influenced me. They weren't perfect people, but their dedicated lives inspired me and made me want to emulate them.

What is my advice for someone thinking about coming to seminary? This is difficult to answer, because I didn't really know that I wanted to come, and sometimes I still wonder within myself if it is right to be here. If you wait to be a hundred percent sure, however, you might never come, or if you come you might be shocked. I think God is talking to people on the fence. He calls people who are broken and are not sure. Broken and humble people are the ones God works through. Those on the fence, me included, have an opportunity to come and find out what God wants. If the calling is real, it won't go away. You can't wait until you are the perfect person or seminarian to go.

The Archdiocese programs have helped me and my life and journey until now. The blessings of Metropolitan JOSEPH, and the camping and youth and YES programs and Focus programs, which I still am part of, have all formed me to be the person that I am. Also, the priests and bishops of the Archdiocese have all been very responsive and encouraging. They want us to succeed and become leaders in the Church. The Antiochian Archdiocese is one

family, and you can go to any of the bishops and priests with any question that you have.



#### DEACON ANDREW SALVIA

I come from Virginia by way of North Carolina. I consider myself average American. My mother's side of the family came from England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; my father's family came from Sicily at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to New York. I was married in 2013 to my lovely wife Alethia. We had an Orthodox wedding. We have four healthy, energetic boys, and we are expecting a girl in early July.

Before seminary, I worked in facilities management, as an auto insurance adjuster, and did some auto body work, so I have a lot of customer service experience.

My earliest remembrances of God are a string of memories of my parents praying with me at night before bed, and reading Bible stories. They talked to me about God and things happening throughout the world. Nothing was ever off-limits. They were very consistent about church and were always a good example of a Christian witness.

I am a convert to Orthodoxy. I had priests who were very devout and consistently faithful to God, their families, and their congregations. Neither of them were perfect, of course, but I would say that both exemplified the qualities that got the mental wheels turning regarding my vocation.

The two priests who influenced my discernment were the priest who accepted me into the Church, who was very supportive, and my current pastor,

Fr. James Girgus. My bishop, His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, gave me some pretty good advice. He was very blunt about it. He said, “You may be crazy, because it comes with so many demands, but if you feel called to do it, let’s keep talking about it.” The event that brought it to a head was my mom’s sudden death in January 2020. It solidified the desire to serve God and His church. Confronted with mortality and finality, and realizing that we will all go through this, I wanted to serve people where they are. It would be so difficult to go through these kinds of things without God.

Hopelessness is common in our society. People are trying to fill the God-sized hole in their hearts with ideologies, consumerism, and philosophies, but we all know that only God can fill what is lacking in us, that deep, dark, hole, where God belongs. In our culture there is no more forgiveness or gentleness. We can bring that back. We celebrate St. Mary of Egypt, in spite of the terrible things she had done; the example of her repentance brings hope to countless people.

I could not have come here without the help of the Archdiocese. They take care of our rent and expenses. As you know, I have four boys, and a girl on the way. I don’t know how I could have done that without Archdiocese support, or support from our local diocese. Having a bishop who will talk with you all the time, answer e-mails, and accept phone calls, is so encouraging. He is willing to chat with my family, too. The local Antiochian parishes of this area, where everyone has been so welcoming, have been great, so welcoming and supportive. My children love going there. They ask, “When can we go to St. George in Little Falls, or when can we go to St. Mary’s in Yonkers?” They love them so much. You can feel the support. When things are challenging, you know that the Archdiocese has your back. You know they are praying for you. I can’t speak to what the other jurisdictions have, but we have been blessed.

Seminary has been tremendous. The academic life has been challenging, but not impossible. We are constantly being stretched and molded. The spiritual life has been incredible. We have daily services, and often liturgies during the week. Antiochian students have opportunities to use our rubrics and use Byzantine music. We support each other when in need. I would encourage everyone feeling a vocation to visit and come. Seminary has been a

wonderful experience. I can’t speak highly enough about the school here.

Fr. Bogdan Bucur in particular has been a fantastic professor and confessor. My wife and I go to him for confession and spiritual advice. The children love him. He is very approachable and wise. He has gone through similar experiences. Like us, he has raised children. He has gone through theological training and served in a parish. He has been a great example. You can approach him when you see him after chapel. He is an example of dedication as a priest and father. He has the whole package.

#### ELIO NICOLAS, M.DIV., METROPOLITAN’S ASSISTANT

I was born in Lebanon, grew up in Kuwait (where I spent most of my early years), and then moved to the States in 2012, intending to do engineering in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Halfway through my studies, I decided that this was not really what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to serve my Church. At that point didn’t know how I would serve, but I wanted to be in the Church. At that time, I was at Camp St. Raphael. I met a good friend, Chris Abdelahad, who told me what he was up to in life. He was at Hellenic [College] in the religion program, and that planted something. I was on the phone with my mother one day and told her about it, and she asked if I was thinking of doing what he was doing. You know how mothers are, they want to know who you are with, and what they are up to. I said maybe, but not now. She asked why not now? So, I said OK and that started my trip to seminary.



I went to Hellenic College, and when I was done, with the blessing of Sayidna (JOSEPH), I went to St. Vlad's and graduated. That's how I made it to seminary.

Seminary shapes your personality as well as your spiritual life. There is a lot of formation that goes on there. I wouldn't have imagined it happening anywhere else. That has helped me a lot. You also develop a support system with your fellow seminarians that will not happen anywhere else. At the end of the day, the world is the same for almost all of us, regardless of what our ministry is. We all have difficulties, but we support each other. In particular, the liturgical life at seminary prepares you a lot. It helps me greatly.

The main source of my inspiration to work is watching His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH do all of the work he does at his age. He does not stop. God grant him many years. He is very inspiring. When I see him work that tirelessly, I feel I should not be complaining, but should work more. At the same time, I like to serve the Church. When I travel with Sayidna, we see all kinds of people who are serving the Church in so many different ways. Many of them have never driven near a seminary in their whole life, yet they serve, and this inspires me. On every trip I look forward to seeing this and this recharges me.

The Archdiocese has played a major role in my experience. The Archdiocese is one big network, one big family, with so many rich resources: its history, people, and experiences as well. By experiences I mean the camp, the programs, the things that keep us on the path. The Archdiocese, too, has lifted the burden of our expenses. The Archdiocese pays for the tuition, housing, and even helps with some of our costs to travel to the area parishes.

We all have a little voice in us. If we are called to serve the Church, we have a little voice. Whether we can hear that voice depends on how quiet we are. A lot of noise around us can drown it out. When we become quiet, we can hear the voice, and make the decision to go to seminary. So my advice to people who think they may have a vocation is to be patient, and work to hear that voice. Then seminary will find its way to that person.

## RONNIE AUSTIN

My wife and I are from Southern California. We come from St. Barnabas Church in Costa Mesa, with Fr. Wayne Wilson and Fr. Michael Regan. I just had a Zoom call with them yesterday, and it was really nice to be reminded of their love and support. I am the older of two children. My younger brother and I did not grow up Christians, but there were Christian backgrounds on both sides of our family. My wife and I have not yet been blessed with children. The desire is in our heart, we know the prayers at our wedding, so we wait for God's timing.

Someone who helped me discern my vocation when I was in high school is George Magritte. We made a connection. He is a firefighter with the Los Angeles Fire Department. He brought the Scriptures to life for me. He would constantly encourage me and edify me with the Epistle of Timothy. I realize how fortunate I was to have that. Not all young men get to have that kind of relationship. He is still a friend and mentor. If I can give back a little bit of what I received from him, it is the right thing to do.

One of the best things about Orthodoxy is our Nicene Creed. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is something I always felt was true. At a young age, I had a thought that there is a God, and I wanted to know who He is. I want to keep that sincerity and openness of heart. When I was 15, I was invited to church, and I gave my life to follow





Him. Thankfully He brought me George, who helped me through a very difficult time. I think that 15 is a difficult time for everybody. Another 15 years later, through a friend of the family, we discovered Orthodoxy. I had met it before, through a friend who went to the Serbian Cathedral in Los Angeles. When I got out of the military, the Air Force, and active duty, I was invited to check out St. Barnabas, and I did that. I was then a reservist in Riverside, with Fr. Josiah. So, I got plugged in at St. Barnabas and St. Andrew's in Riverside.

Metropolitan JOSEPH is our beloved bishop on the West Coast. Every time I hear him speak, he brings the word of God. I couldn't have asked for a better mentor. Not only his words, but his actions speak volumes. He did so much on the West Coast, with Bishop MAXIM and the others. For the Sunday of Orthodoxy, I remember going to the Serbian Cathedral, and I distinctly remember getting to know my wife, Rebecca. You can't be unsure of things and must be cautious, but when God directs and you know it is from God, it will keep coming back. Sayidna JOSEPH is great. Also, I am grateful to Sayidna PHILIP of blessed memory for what he did about bringing in the EOC [Evangelical Orthodox Church] and Campus ministry. As I study the history, I am grateful.

What surprised me about seminary is both how little I knew, and at the same time how much I did know. I am surprised by where I am in this journey, wanting to go deeper in my walk with the Lord. I'm very content with where He has brought me, and God keeps bringing me higher. It is good. As Fr. Chad quotes Fr. Thomas Hopko, who quoted Fr. Alexander, the Devil isn't in Time Square, but is working here.

I would thank all of the wonderful professors, faculty, staff, and administrators here, but one who is particularly dear to me is Dr. Bouteneff, who is a very gentle spirit. He teaches dogmatics, and I took a spirituality course with him. He is loving and tender, as are all of the professors, but I feel a special connection to him. Fr. Bogdan Bucur is another one who is amazing. Speaking of Sayidna JOSEPH bringing the word of God, Fr. Bogdan is just a wonderful speaker and homilist, and is just exciting. Anyone should look him up and see what I'm talking about.

One of the major themes of all of our professors is the patristic teaching, and how we do theology.

What the Scriptures mean is best explained by the Fathers. To understand what our Lord was saying to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, I think, requires understanding the mind of the Fathers. It is not enough just to parrot what was taught, but to understand it, live it, and apply it to what is going on today. I just came from my dear brother's ordination to the diaconate in North Carolina, and Bishop GARASIM was talking about how Seraphim Rose was responding to people of his time. Perhaps today he would speak a little differently. We need to take the legacy as we receive it and express it for others to come to that true faith that leads to life. That is to be transformed, and renewed, and to grow in the likeness that we were created for.

How would I speak to someone discerning a vocation? First, I am terrified. I am seeking ordination because what brought me here was military chaplaincy. The military wants you to be a priest. Being a parish priest was not my thought or desire, but to step out in faith, the faith of Abraham and Isaac, is to trust. Self-emptying is a new idea to me: we need to empty ourselves, so that God can fill us. Don't trust in yourself, trust in Him. Think of the greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and your neighbor. This is a new discovery for me as well. It's not just the neighbor who is geographically and temporally close, but those who came before us, and our future neighbors. What are we doing as stewards to keep and preserve our faith, and to give the next generation something better? All those things will leave you with no time to be anxious, but you can cast your cares upon Him and come, because it's the opportunity. I wish that everybody would be able to come and learn about our faith which is so rich, and so beautiful, and so deep. It is an inexhaustible well.

#### CHRISTOPHER ABDELAHAD

I am from Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, and I go to the St. George Cathedral in Worcester. I was at St. George in Miami, where I was Youth Director and Pastoral Assistant, before coming to seminary. I am engaged and getting married in less than two months.

My first experiences in the Church were when I was very young. As my dad was the priest at St. George, my brothers and I use to go to Church with him to set up the candles for the services. I started serving on the altar when I was





## DEACON NICHOLAS FINE

I'm the only child of my parents, married, with two boys. I was born in Portland Oregon, lived in South-west Oregon, and went to school there.

I was raised Protestant and converted when I was an undergraduate. I always wanted to be in ministry. When

I was converting, my priest told me to take some time, I wasn't married yet. So, I got a job at Starbucks when I got out of college, and what I thought would be a one-year gig turned out to be seven years. (*The WORD suggested that Starbucks was a place to give free pastoral care.*) There were times when I did minister to people. I didn't completely fail at it; it was a huge learning experience. The job was good, it was very flexible, and I could get to church and other things.

My earliest memory of God would be when I was five. My grandfather died, and I remember praying to God, and in some way to my grandfather. I didn't really understand much, but I knew that grandpa was in heaven, so I would talk to God and to my grandpa. That was my earliest memory. I was always trusting, and so when people told me there was a God, I said of course, that makes sense to me. I was child-like, so I said Yes, there is a God. If there is a God, that is somebody I want to interact with. So, I was consistent in talking to God like I would talk to my own parents or something. I was involved in the Protestant church in Middle School and was involved in the church programs, played worship music, and stuff like that. They were very

two years old. My grandmother actually made me a special robe because none to the robes would fit me. I always loved being in the altar and serving the church.

My biggest influence was my dad. The greatest event was when Metropolitan PHILIP would visit. We would get ready for the visit. I always found it so awesome.

The Archdiocese played a big role in my formation. I have been in the Archdiocese my whole life. When I was in Miami, I called Fr. Nick Belcher when he was working at the Archdiocese, and he got me an application, though I was late. The Archdiocese has always been a big part of my life and have always been very good to me.

Fellowship has made the seminary special. I have made good friends whom I can rely on. You can go to them when you need anything. Everyone is there with you. The fellowship is for me very big.

Seminary has prepared me for parish work. They have done a good job, especially pastoral care.

I was happy with lots of my professors. I especially appreciate Fr. Eric Tosi, who taught pastoral care, and Fr. Chad Hatfield. They were very practical and helpful. Fr. Tosi was amazing, and he was asked to teach the class only three weeks before it began. His teaching is so practical and helpful.

Going to Hellenic [College] helped prepare me for seminary. I came without expectations.

I would encourage anyone who feels called to serve to do it. The Church needs more people, and I would say give it your all.



encouraging in my faith. When I converted, my first priest was also very encouraging in my relationship with God, helped me with confession and everything like that.

I would suggest that a vocation is something that God has to place on your heart, and you have to want to do it. One needs to desire to do this ministry, and to know that God is your support. Our main encouragement needs to come from God. We need the support of our leaders and peers, but there needs to be the self-awareness that God has called us to do this, at least that God has given us the desire to be equipped for doing such ministry.

At seminary, the community is what helped me the most. My father-confessor has been helpful, and, of course, my wife and family. The community is very strong, and we have been very open with each other about our successes and struggles. All of these things are good. My confessor is very helpful. He can draw things out and say things directly to me without my being defensive or hurt. He is very encouraging.

Sayidna JOSEPH and the Archdiocese have been very encouraging. When Sayidna JOSEPH visited our parish in Portland, I spoke to him and told him that I had a desire to go to seminary. I applied, and then Covid hit. I was in touch with Fr. Tom Zain and he kept me in the loop and obviously the Archdiocese has been very supportive. I almost felt that it was almost too easy. Everyone got back to me and shared what I needed to do. The support of the Archdiocese and organizations like the Order of St. Ignatius and the Antiochian Women have been great. The financial help has been wonderful. We are getting the most support.

My shout-out goes to Fr. Bogdan. His pedagogy, his knowledge, his personality; he is unassuming, funny, easy to get along with, Romanian... such a combination!

I was surprised by how busy we are at seminary, and by the strain on the family. We have long days, and it's hard to know what to let go of. That has been a surprise and struggle.

I think that what a new pastor needs to do is get involved in the community and get people's buy-in. For one to be their new priest, one needs to try to move slowly to change things. We need to keep healthy habits, to avoid burn-out, and to take care of our families. We also need to keep in the balance being there for our

parishioners. I have seen priests suffer from burn-out, so I know it's going to happen. To prepare for that, you need to practice good and healthy habits of self-care. There is a spiritual dimension to this as well. The pastor has a very isolated role in the community. He can't be everyone's buddy. The priest needs to develop a support group outside the parish to meet his needs. These are the most difficult things for me.

#### FR. THOMAS MILLER

I am almost 43, married to my wife Jordan, and have four children: Eleanor 8, Timothy 6, George 4, and Cyril 2. Cyril was born here at St. Vladimir's. I'm originally from Florida; that is where I met my wife. We moved to Colorado, where we had Eleanor and Timothy, and we had George when we were in Oklahoma. We moved around because I was an Airforce officer.

I went through a period of discernment. I was trying to decide if I should remain in the Airforce as a career, or come and become a priest. I was given a career opportunity of a lifetime. I had an opportunity to be a Colonel and was accepted to come to the seminary. So, I was presented with what was for me two good options. In many ways God gave me the opportunity to choose to come here and not meander a way here. It was a difficult decision, but something I would appreciate more and more. Coming here was my choice.

Surprises. A global pandemic was pretty challenging, including the isolation, lack of services, and the lack of normalcy. We were not around family. We were in a population center that was ground



zero for the first major Covid outbreaks, Westchester County. So there was a lot of uncertainty at that time. The school had to shift how things were going to be done. Fr. Chad, faculty, and staff did a great job keeping us as safe as possible and in person, keeping us engaged. We split up for worship; we had an Antiochian chapel in which we were able to participate even more than we could have in our parish assignments. All of this kept us together. We took advantage of it. It was a trying time, but I'll look back on it with fondness.

My seminary experience has been invaluable in that respect. My engagement with the faculty is world-class. Their commitment to the students and also their commitment to the Church creates an environment that provides the conditions for spiritual growth. The daily services and the opportunity to go out to Antiochian parishes and serve with our own rubrics, to get to know parishioners, and to interact with them, has all been helpful to my formation. All these things help prepare me for life as a pastor.

I want to express my thanks to Dr. Peter Boute-noff. I took a class called Prayer and Sanctity, which was such a joy. It was applied theology. We interacted with the services, prayer, the lives of the saints, and hymnography. In so many ways it was theology applied. At the end of our 13-week semester we had become a little community facilitated by Dr. Boute-noff's teaching style. It was a joy to be in the class.

The support we get as Antiochian seminarians is incredible. I won't sugar coat anything. I came here after a career and had to tighten my belt a little bit, but the Archdiocese under Sayidna JOSEPH's leadership does everything it can to ensure that a man who wants to come and train to be a priest in a residential environment can do that, without taking on debt, and can live in a reasonable way with food on his table and a roof over his head. It was really a weight off my shoulders. At the end of the day, my main concern was my own family. I wanted to take care of my family, because church life will be an adjustment for them, as well as for me. So knowing that I would be taken care of financially was a great relief. From the Archdiocese we get our courses; Fr. Nick Belcher and Fr. John El Maseih instruct us. We are learning Antiochian rubrics and have parish assignments.

A period of discernment is necessary. Talk to your father-confessor, your pastor, your priest. They may be the same person; they may not be. Pray. If

you are married, talk to your wife. At some point, however, you need to fix your eyes on Christ and step out of the boat.

### JOSH WILLIAMS

I am a single seminarian from Colorado, and the first-born in my family. I am a convert, and the only member of my family who is Orthodox. I came to Orthodoxy through much prayer and discernment in High School. Finally, I walked into an Antiochian Church while in college, and I never walked out. Now, six years later, here I am at seminary.

My biggest surprise was the level of fellowship. Unlike traditional graduate schools, you are not just going to classes together, but you are eating all of your meals together, praying twice a day in the chapel together, and then you are all seeking the Lord together. My classmates have been an encouragement and helped me get through this year.

I am in the Master of Arts program, so I am in the non-ordination track at the seminary. Before coming, I was a volunteer youth worker at our mission, and before that was the youth worker at the Presbyterian Church in which I grew up. So, part of my decision to come here was to go back and teach my students, as well as grow in my own faith.

His Eminence Sayinda JOSEPH told me that the seminary is available both to those on an ordination track as well as those who are not. The Archdiocese wants you to come here.

I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Barnett. He is our Greek and New Testament instructor. He has been so accommodating as we have gone





through our first year. Greek has been challenging, but he works with us, in and out of class, to push us to excel. Moving cross-country was difficult for me, and adjusting from working to becoming a student again was challenging. I graduated in 2018 with an undergraduate degree and then I worked for three years in non-profit development. Making the decision to come was difficult, but I spoke with my pastor and together we made the decision that I should come. That has been the biggest challenge.

Everything the seminary does is designed to help you grow spiritually. We do everything in community, so we start our day and end our day together in prayer. Almost all of our classes are taught by clergy, and those not clergy are super-humble, pious men and women who are seeking the Lord. Everything we do together is to build each other up and is to seek the Lord.

I would tell everyone on the fence to do it. It is super-edifying, and everyone you meet is wonderful. You can't beat it. I would definitely encourage people to come.

#### DEACON JOHN VAZQUEZ (WILL)

**I** was born in 1985 to Dn. Basil and Joanne. My father is Puerto Rican in origin and my mother is Italian. They were part of the Evangelical Orthodox Church movement in the 1980s that entered the Archdiocese when I was two years old. So, I basically grew up in the Orthodox Church. I was born in Indianapolis, moved out to California for three years, and then got to Ohio. There I grew up at St. Matthew's Orthodox Church, with Fr. Matthew Harman, who is my godfather. From Cleveland,

I went to Penn State University and played baseball there. Then I played professional baseball for a while, and after that coached baseball a while in Indiana. My wife and I had been there for the last ten years or twelve years. Most recently we lived in the outskirts of Indiana.

My parents had the biggest impact on my life. They have been faithful as long as I have known them. Their own stories and how I saw them live their lives has affected me. This has been tangible proof to me that God is real, and He can help in our lives and transform us. In addition to my parents, I have had wonderful male role models. My Godfather, Fr. Andrew, as I was growing up taught me through confession, and my father-in-law who is a Carpathian-Russian priest, a wonderful man, has also been an example. Other men as I have grown up have had a big impact on me and shown me who God is.

I was just telling someone here that baseball is a very slow game and as such has lots of correlations with the spiritual life. Technically, the game could never end. If there were a series of tying the game, you have to get that last "out" for the game to end. So, baseball, like the spiritual life, can be timeless. In baseball, like the Christian life, you need to end well. You need to get the last strike or "out." The martyrs end well, professing the faith. It doesn't matter so much how you begin; it's how you end that matters most. Another correlation is that you need to make adjustments from game to game, from bat to bat, from pitch to pitch. Just as in the spiritual life, we fall down, get up, fall down, and get up. We can't keep doing the same thing, banging our head against the wall, and expect a different result. In the spiritual life there is a synergy between God leading us and our energy. We need to make that effort to pray, to fast, and to remain faithful.

Seminary has been a beautiful experience. It has offered challenges academically. All things have helped in growing my faith. It has rounded out my faith, helping me deal with nuance and depth and gray. I have learned so much and seeing the gray helps you be a little more compassionate with others and yourself. The community here is wonderful, being with people on the same path, all wanting the same things. So when you are around so many like-minded people, that is good thing. There are some challenges living so close to everyone, but that's real life: trying to live with your neighbor and grow with



your neighbor. It's a wonderful experience.

I want to express my appreciation of Fr. Bogdan Bucur, whose Old Testament class was wonderful, and to Fr. Silvio Bunta, a visiting professor whose Psalms class was excellent.

Sayidna JOSEPH wants us to do well here and supports us. This does not go unnoticed. He makes sure that we have what we need. The Archdiocese pays for our school and living expenses and I think seeing Sayidna at the ordinations of my classmates has made an impact on my life. He is joyful when he does that, and shows his love. His sermons show that he wants us to do well, and that he takes his responsibilities very seriously.

I think the biggest thing for those feeling called is to approach it through prayer. All of us here feel a call, so we need to talk to one another. If you feel a call, you should talk to your priests, or someone close to you, your wife, for example, and see what he or she thinks. Let others help you discern and hear the call. Don't push the call aside. If it comes to you, pursue it, and walk through the doors as long as they are open.

When I was in high school, I remember my priest approaching me and asking me if I had considered priesthood. I told him that I wanted to play professional ball, and perhaps serve the Church in other ways someday. Later, when I was playing ball, however, at some point I wasn't sure I wanted to do that anymore. I then remember reading that, if you want to be perfect, you should sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow Him. I thought God was asking me at that moment to come. That was ten years ago. I asked my wife about it, and she wasn't too keen on it at that time. She had some experience as a priest's kid. When she was 17 her father had become a priest. She didn't have the young experience of clergy families, but did have some ideas. After that a friend talked about it, and we felt better about it.

Pursing this vocation, for me at least, has been trying to follow the path God has for me. As doors keep opening, I keep following. I really encourage anyone with a call or inclination, or even if they don't know if it's a call, to listen and pray. We do need clergy and the church can't be the best-kept secret in America anymore.

## DEACON ANTHONY GILLBERT

I'm from a couple of places, originally the San Diego area of Southern California, but most recently, St. George, Wichita, Kansas. I was very happy to be in Wichita; it was a hard place to leave. I grew up Protestant, and found the Church in my college years. I studied in Greece and started reading after that. I'm married, with four children. We have a busy household at home. I'm the oldest in a family of three children.

During our time in California, I found myself teaching at an Orthodox College. It was a beautiful thing. I enjoyed it very much, and benefited from it, but I found myself getting drawn into parish ministry, parish life, and education. While serving in the altar and working in the parish, I felt in my heart pulled in that direction. In our time as Protestants, my wife and I were both involved in lots of ministries with the poor, and other things, too. After coming to Orthodoxy, we started realizing that we have been missing that. Getting integrated more fully into parish life helped, and outreach ministries there helped us realize that this is something perhaps I am called to. I didn't rush that or push that, I didn't push down any doors or try to, I just slowly discerned the call. It was a combination of both education and liturgy. It was no specific event. There were many people who influenced me, but not one event.

I think I was more relieved than surprised to get here. As it was in the middle of the pandemic, I didn't come in with many expectations. If I were to name one thing, however, I would say it was that



we did remain in-person. The seminary did a fine job setting that fine line, balancing safety with community needs and life. There was good formation. While schools around us were going digital and remote, we were able to remain in-person. The other surprise was the community here. There are a number of families that we have gotten close to, as well as faculty and staff. The staff works overtime to make this place genuinely formative. It doesn't just look good on paper, and then when you get here you find something else. There is a real integration of the pastoral and academic, and there is also the liturgical aspect to it as well.

I would give a shout-out to Fr. Bogdan Bucur, who teaches Dogma and Patristics. My first year, he taught Introduction to Scripture, too. They now have a full-time Scripture person to do that. His approach to the way the Scriptures and the Fathers go together hand-in-hand was very illuminating. It made an impact on a number of folks, and will continue to do so. He is very humble. He is a man who can walk the walk in the academic world, but knows how living one's life in the Church informs, or should inform, one's scholarship.

It is so nice, coming from the West Coast, to be so close to the Archdiocese. We have Fr. Nick here, and the headquarters, and Fr. John from Washington, D.C., through Zoom. The engagement we get from both Fr. Nick and Fr. Jeremy is very supportive. They answer the questions we have. Our engagement with the local parishes is very helpful. I found the Archdiocese to be very accessible. It is a joy to serve with Sayidna JOSEPH every time he is in the area, and for us to get to know him and for him to get to know us. He gives us advice on what he knows from the larger picture and the Church in America in the moment. It has been a delight.

My advice to those feeling a vocation is listen to the "still, small voice" in your heart. The world around us is giving us different paths, but this is an ancient calling which is needed more than ever today. I was myself a little surprised. I wouldn't rush it. I didn't rush. Listen, however, and don't deny it. Seek the advice of your pastor and spiritual father, and get his input. It's not just internal, but the call needs external validation. Speak to those you trust and whose opinions matter to you on this matter. Sometimes the voice is still and small, but listen for it. Be open to what God has.

I have no regrets so far, and may that continue to be the case. There are ways that I am challenged and realize that I have a long way to go, but that is far from regret. The Lord challenges me. God stresses us because He has more for us. No regrets.

### JOSHUA BIRDSALL

I came to seminary from Louisville, Kentucky, with my wife Lindsey, and we have a son, John Samuel, who is seven. I'm 39. Before Louisville I lived in Boston, and before that we lived in Buffalo, New York. I'm the first of six children. I'm a convert, and grew up in a faithful Baptist, evangelical home. My grandfather was an Episcopal priest. I went to a Jesuit all-boys high school, and then to a faithful, evangelical college. So, I was very confused and



spent my college years trying to figure out my journey. That is when I discovered Orthodoxy. I was at Gordon College, north of Boston, and started reading Church history, because I was really interested in the history of the faith in America. I joined a dialogue there. There was a "great books" program, and I started reading stuff that was not Protestant. From there I started meeting people who were not Protestant. I got to study abroad in England. The first Orthodox Church I visited was at Oxford, where Bishop KALLISTOS (Ware) was. I didn't know who he was. I didn't know anything. My journey was still through the intellectual path. A lot of guys take the same route, but once the Church got me it wasn't about my intellect at all. It was all about life. I can remember sitting in my dorm at Oxford, reading Abba Dorotheos, and thinking, I've never



read anybody like this. He has been dead a millennium and a half, and he knows more about me and what is inside than I do. After that I couldn't go anywhere else. It took me a long time to get baptized. It was another five or six years to be received into the Church. But I really didn't go anywhere else. It was like a spiral circling. I had lots of questions and God was very patient with me. Finally, I found my way in.

My experience at St. Vladimir's has been phenomenal. I am very thankful that the Archdiocese supports us here. It is total, Orthodox immersion. We have the chapel here, and prayer there caps the day, morning and night. The life here forms you to do what you will do later. There is more to do here than there is time to do it. It forces you to prioritize and use time wisely. Then you drink as deeply as you can from all of the beautiful resources that are here. The professors here are amazing. We feel very, very blessed.

We were not as surprised as some others here. My wife is from this area, so the locale didn't surprise us. We have been around priests and had some ideas about the life. Since I got baptized, my wife worked for an Antiochian Church in Louisville. We had a lot of people tell us what life would be like here. They were honest, so that was helpful. The surprising thing for me has been the strong confirmation of the call. I circled the call for a long time. Being here has helped me feel God's confirmation through the people here. That has come through difficult conversations and some positive confirmations. Another surprise is how it has encouraged me to do the internal work that is so necessary. I had put that off. I'm not sure if it's the seminary or me, but there is space and encouragement here to do that. People will tell you that maybe it's more important for you to do *this* than to get an A in that class. Maybe you should be with your wife, instead of getting an A on that paper. I'm a perfectionist, and want that A, and the dean's list, but we need to take care of our families, too. There are folks here who will tell you to take care of the parts of your life that will sustain you when you get out of here. You need to take care of them. This has been really freeing to me, and very helpful.

The instructors here are amazing. I thank Dr. Barnette, our Greek and Scriptures Professor. He has done an extracurricular reading group that meets on Sundays and looks at the Sunday readings.

He doesn't preach on it, he teaches, so I feel better prepared to understand and will have notes to use for the rest of my career. We dig deeply into the Scriptures. The readings that the Church has selected for us to read, especially during Lent, are of particular importance. He gives us lots of extra time that is not required of him. He is hugely available.

I was received into the Orthodox Church in the Bulgarian parish in Alston (near Boston) and finding the Antiochian Archdiocese feels like coming home. I am grateful for Sayidna JOSEPH and the way he leads: simply, faithfully, an orthodoxy lived, an orthodoxy that is his life. His liturgy is relaxed and part of his life. This is our experience of liturgy. I would like to see Sayidna even more, as it is very helpful.

What the world needs from the Church or what I need from the Church is the message that God loves us more than we can understand. I think that we don't know ourselves at all, and maybe we Americans are so overloaded with input and distractions that we can become confused as to what defines us. A real, tried-and-true path is ours. When I look around the world and see the problems, I don't think that programs and politics are going to fix them. The problems will be solved by people looking into their hearts and finding God. Jesus Christ opened the pathway to God and only God can fix things. The interior life is the real frontier.

What I want to share with you (the bishops) is that, while I was in Louisville, my priest Fr. Alexis Khoury, who was in Louisville, and another Khouria at the Church, Venessa, within a week of each other point-blank asked me if I had thought of being a priest. For some reason, although I had thought of it, priesthood felt closed to me. For whatever reason, for me, that question opened a pathway. At that moment it took the roof off. There were other things in my life that were different at that time as well. I had paid off my school loans, I had financial stability, I didn't have to continue to worry about climbing the ladder of finances. What I want you to know is that I'm not sure I would be here if they hadn't asked the question. Their question initiated an internal conversation and a talk with my wife which brought me here. They probably don't know how big an impact that had, but it was huge.

**GETTING TO KNOW OUR SEMINARIANS  
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE**

ADDRESS BY HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN JOSEPH

# COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES OF THE SAINT CONSTANTINE COLLEGE

HOUSTON, TEXAS, MAY 12, 2022

Reverend Clergy,  
College President Dr. John Mark Reynolds and Learned Faculty Members of the College, Vice-Chair Fawaz El-Khoury and Esteemed Members of our Archdiocese Board of Trustees, Generous Benefactors of the School and College, Honored Graduates, and Beloved Family and Friends,

Christ is risen!

We are gathered today to honor the achievement of these young people, who have studied with dedication for years and now earned their degree. It is an occasion for reflecting on the importance of a good education like that which they have received here at The Saint Constantine College. It is also a time to look ahead to the next phase of their lives and offer some encouragement. I once received a phone call from the Police Commissioner of New York. He said, “Your Eminence, I need your help,” and I was taken aback. This man had 35,000 officers under his command and a six-billion-dollar budget to spend. He had education and experience that led him to one of the top law enforcement jobs in the country. What help could he need from me? He went on to explain: “We have many tools and tactics to threaten, control, or punish behavior, but you, as a church, have a much profounder influence. You can reach people’s hearts and minds.” He made an impression on me that day by recognizing something we as a church have always known: the solutions to

mankind’s problems are not found in tools and tactics – not in technology and techniques – but in the healing and enlightenment of the inner person, the heart and mind. Thus, the holy Apostle Paul exhorts us to “be transformed by the renewal of the mind” (Romans 12:2). Most schools and colleges today are focused on tools, tactics, technology, and techniques – on knowledge that can be used to manipulate the exterior world. The value of this kind of knowledge is limited. Without something deeper, it becomes just a way of devising more efficient means for selfishness, oppression, and cruelty.

The Saint Constantine School and College, like so many other Orthodox Christian schools across the country, is guided by a different vision. Education here is not just about information but about formation of the soul; it is focused not just on acquiring knowledge, but on seeking wisdom. Through your studies you have come into contact with our Lord Jesus Christ, His apostles and saints, and a host of other teachers from across the ages. You have learned from them not just an accumulation







of data, but an appreciation for the human condition as well as its redemption through Christ. This enlightened perspective is the greatest gift you have received during your years here, and now you are called to share it with our world.

The world needs the light of Christ more than biology, physics, accounting, or even medicine – as useful as these fields of knowledge are. Therefore, you are being sent out to use what you have learned to edify and benefit your neighbors and your communities. The Lord Jesus once sent His disciples – that is, His students – into the world with these words: “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore, be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). I can give you no better advice. As you live and work among people who hold very different values and beliefs, you must strive to remain true to Christ through this paradoxical combination of cunning and innocence. On one hand, you must be careful, wise, and even cunning in negotiating relationships and engaging social structures that are opposed to the gospel. On the other hand, you must never lose the innocence of humility and love that define followers of Christ. We can only be effective in our lives and ministries as Christians by cultivating both sides of this paradoxical combination.

Finally, as you leave school and begin your independent lives as young adults, I exhort you to keep your eyes fixed on the true and eternal measure of success. The world tries to convince us that success

is found in money, fame, self-gratification, and the like, but Christ has shown us that none of these matter in the end. The Orthodox Christian funeral service includes these words: “All mortal things are vanity and exist not after death. Riches endure not, neither doth glory accompany on the way, for when death cometh, all these things vanish utterly.”

No, the true measure of success is whether we live in faithfulness to God, learning and obeying His commandments. The Lord said this in the Sermon on the Mount: “Whoever looses one of the least of these commandments and teaches people to do so – he will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever does and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:19). Strive to be those who do and teach the divine commandments. If you err or stumble, as we all do from time to time, don’t give up, but instead return to God in repentance and confession. As long as we are willing to try, He is willing to help us prepare for that glorious eternity to which He has called us. This is so much more important than any paycheck, promotion, or award you will ever receive, so seek it with all your heart. Finally, my blessings and the blessings of your teachers and parents go with you. May the Lord bless and keep you and make His face to shine upon you all the days of your life.



"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

# DIGGIN' THE DIRT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

"WHAT HAVE I LEARNED ON VACATION? THAT A TINY WHITE MOTH FLUTTERING ABOUT GREEN BRANCHES IS WORTHY OF TIME – AND THAT THE MIGHTY SPIDER MAY SLAY FEW DRAGONS, BUT NOT FOR LACK OF TRYING."



The missus and I took a trip to the Pacific Northwest earlier this year. It was nice to get away, our first true vacation since Covid. We spent most of our time in and around Washington's state and federal parks. The weekends found us in church.

First off, how can you tell if a Washingtonian is going to church or camping? The answer is *head coverings*. Joke! Actually, having served missions

for many years in the Appalachian Mountains, the common dress of those in the Pacific Northwest was familiar, both in the park and in the temple.

First up: Saints Joachim and Anna Mission in Goldendale. *WOW*. I've been doing mission work for thirty years, and I've never seen anything like this. For example, this community, only ten years old, recently bought an old church building and

refurbished it as a proper temple. They moved in on Great and Holy Friday 2022. We were there a few weeks after that, Sunday of the Myrrh-bearers, and they had 65 for Great Vespers and around 150 at Liturgy. They were spilling out into the narthex, even outside. *What a joy!* After Fr. John Phelps introduced me at the of Liturgy, I told those gathered, “My goodness! You just bought the place and you’ve already outgrown it!”

As some of you are aware, there’s another factor here: a nearby monastery. This, too, was a source of joy. St. John the Forerunner Monastery in Golden-dale is a thriving monastic community with a popular bakery right on a main thoroughfare to and from Oregon. Truckers pass the bakery every day, many stopping in for their favorite Greek breads, pastries, and other goodies. Of course, being Orthodox, there’s also coffee, icons, and books. The nuns work in the bakery, assisted by pilgrims and volunteers. In fact, the Mission and the Monastery are mutuals in ministry. That is a blessing to behold!

Would that we had more monasteries!

Would that we had more shared ministries among parishes and monasteries!

Would that more of you agreed with my opinion! *Heh heh.*

Granted, your mileage may vary. But in Golden-dale – *it works.*

I confess, the following weekend we’d planned to play hooky. I mean, we were out in the Puget Sound with no parish around. On Saturday night, however, I looked up the nearest Orthodox parish, only to find my friend Fr. David Hovik’s community, St. Andrew, Arlington, was one hour and forty minutes away.

Having not told Fr David we were coming, he was surprised to see us. I was surprised to see and hear that, the next day, they would commence the continuing expansion of their temple – which was full that Sunday.

“Life is available at all times when we call upon God, love God. God is not us; we are not Him. Our reasoning is flawed, always; God’s love is great-er, always. Each person is His delight – and good

pleasure awaits those who reciprocate. Delight in the Lord, Who is our salvation!”

Our final weekend found us in Portland, visiting St. George Church, where they had a number of Anglicans in various stages of coming into the church as a group. I was blessed to have a couple of Q&A sessions with these catechumens, who were thrilled to be learning about the true faith.

So, yes, Orthodoxy is *alive* in the Pacific Northwest.

Be that as it may, back then we were all still a bit beat up by the currents of the world, the daily tsunami of worries and bad news. Such that, during a visit with my old friend, Fr. Joseph Copeland of Holy Cross, Yakima, I said: “Is there any *good* news, Abouna? Tell me: What is the good news?” Without hesitation, he said, “We are being illumined,



more and more people are coming into the Church – and the Lord is coming.” He smiled and added: “I hope He comes soon!” (Full disclosure: I told him I wasn’t ready yet and needed more time to repent.)

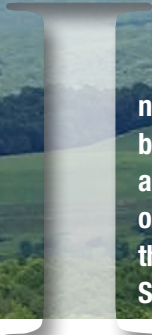
On the final entry of my vacation journal, following a paragraph that bemoaned the dark days in which we live – and, no doubt, inspired by the witness and ministry of the parishes in the Pacific Northwest – I wrote: “My hope is that we get plans in place, as able, to care for the people. We must move from a group of folks who like to worship as Orthodox to those who *live* as Orthodox in charity, hospitality, and steadfast faith. Yes, we are blessed. May our soil prove good by the fruit that it bears.”

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



# A VISION OF THE CATHEDRAL ON OUR HOLY MOUNTAIN

Bishop JOHN



In 1985, when Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory had the vision to build a conference center to meet the needs of our growing Archdiocese, it was decided that the location would be the hill by the St. Ignatius Chapel at the Antiochian Village Camp, near Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

The camp director, campers, and camp counselors convinced the Metropolitan and Board of Trustees to move the Conference Center to the entrance of the camp, just outside the gates. This proved to be a brilliant decision, allowing the very different functions and activities of each to be separate and not interfere with the other. The Conference Center was moved outside the gates, but, because it had originally been slated to be built next to the St. Ignatius Church, it was designed without a chapel. For years, prayers were offered in a windowless storage area before being moved to the room that was built as the museum for the Archdiocese. This room is too small for most of the worship events held at the Conference Center.

God has blessed our Archdiocese with miraculous growth and there is no adequate worship space to meet the needs of our campers, gathered clergy, students of the Antiochian House of Studies, or Archdiocese leaders. There is no adequate space to support a monastery community, witnessing to the local community, and no place to sponsor major theological conferences and events. The Antiochian House of Studies has

recently been accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Now we are even better positioned, through “hybrid” education (in person, and remote), to meet the needs of Orthodox and non-Orthodox throughout the world who want to study Orthodox theology or serve the Church in various roles.

Metropolitan JOSEPH shared with the leadership of the Antiochian Women in July his dream to provide for the present and future needs of the Archdiocese. The Cathedral at the Antiochian Village is an essential component of the strategic plan for the Archdiocese. Sayidna recognizes the Antiochian Village as the “hub” of the activities of the Archdiocese and envisions this to be the center for most of the leadership, operations, and planning for the departments and organizations of the Archdiocese.

The Antiochian Women have taken on the responsibility of raising \$750,000 by 2025 to help launch this project, “Building a New Cathedral.” They have already raised almost \$350,000 toward this goal. It is hoped that this project will bless the ladies of our local communities, because the women have always been the visionary leaders of our parishes and Church. It is also hoped that the local efforts of the women will inspire individuals and organizations of the parishes to invest in the future of our beloved Church in North America. Please support your local Antiochian Women’s Project and invest in the future of our God-protected Archdiocese.



# HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN JOSEPH'S OPENING REMARKS AT THE 21ST BIENNIAL CLERGY SYMPOSIUM

THE ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE, JULY 19, 2022

Your Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Your Graces, and Reverend Clergy of our Archdiocese,

Welcome to our Twenty-First Biennial Clergy Symposium. It is a great blessing to be together this week, after a long and difficult separation. Two years ago, we were forced to cancel this gathering as a result of the Covid pandemic. Of course, there were compelling reasons to avoid travel and large gatherings at that time: many people were dying, this disease was not yet well-understood, and medical tools to prevent and manage the disease were still under development. Moreover, governments had severely restricted travel and gatherings. We had to do it, but we also knew that canceling this and other gatherings that summer would be difficult and devastating.

This enforced separation from one another could not have come at a worse time. We were separated from the advice of our mentors and fellow ministers just as we needed to adapt our ministries in the face of new and perplexing challenges. We were separated from our friends and brothers just as fear and loneliness invaded each and every home. We were separated from the bonds of fellowship and corporate prayer just as the spirit of anger, hatred, and divisiveness spread through every part of society, even infiltrating the Church itself. In short, we were separated from one another just as we needed one another most.

Nevertheless, our good and loving God turns even the most terrible difficulties to our benefit, by His grace. "For," as we read in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, "we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, those who are called according to His purpose." We have received many unexpected blessings during this pandemic. Most of our parishes not only survived but thrived, as clergy and laity stepped up to meet the

challenge. Many new visitors and inquirers flocked to our churches in search of hope. Our own souls have also unexpectedly benefited, as we have been reminded to be grateful for many things we formerly took for granted – especially the learning, camaraderie, and edification that come from gathering together under one roof as the Body of Christ.

Being together here today is an opportunity we must not let slip by us. It is an opportunity to heal from all the wounds of the past few years. If we are in need of comfort or counsel from those who know the demands of the priesthood, here among us are brothers with deep experience and compassionate hearts. If we have questions about perplexing situations in our parishes, here are hundreds of brains to pick. If we are alienated from any of our brothers because of offenses perceived or real, now is the time to humble ourselves and be reconciled. And if we have in any way grown distant from God, now is the time to humble ourselves in the Sacrament of Confession and be renewed by Him who gives grace to the humble. Learning together, discussing together, eating together, praying together, and receiving communion together this week is a holy moment that can bring us much healing.

When we leave this blessed place, we must be careful to preserve the healing and empowering spirit of unity and fellowship we encounter here. Over the past two years, we have seen how the evil one tries to divide us and turn us against one another. Let us shield ourselves from his schemes and temptations by striving, in the words of Saint Paul, to "be joined together in the same mind" (1 Corinthians 1:10). In our Orthodox Tradition, the unity of the Church is centered around the bishops. We see this in Saint Ignatius of Antioch's *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, where he urges that nothing be done apart from the bishop and that the priests, deacons,

and laypeople follow where the bishop leads. Likewise, today I urge you always to be mindful that everything you do as clergy is part of the larger ministry of this Archdiocese. You minister as representatives of the Metropolitan in your parishes, a ministry entrusted to you by Christ through the Metropolitan. Therefore, for the health of your ministry and our parishes, let us all be united by the spirit of true obedience – not the grudging acceptance of demands, but the loving and openhearted desire for guidance. This is the intent of all our directives – loving guidance – and I hope that you will always receive them as such and preserve the unity of this holy archdiocesan family.

The theme of this year's Symposium is "On the Spiritual Health of Priest and Parish," and we will be blessed to hear edifying words on this subject from His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY

each morning. Metropolitan GREGORY presides over the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese and serves as the Secretary of our Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops. Your Eminence, thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to be with us.

Our choice of this theme was prompted by the difficulties of the past two years. In the midst of so much suffering, loss, disruption, turmoil, and conflict, we all struggled to maintain a healthy balance and spiritual perspective. The diseases of fear, anger, selfishness, faultfinding, and despair proved an even greater threat than the actual virus that gave rise to them. Many souls are still deeply wounded by what we experienced and in need of the healing that is only found in Christ.

Our Holy Fathers teach us that the Church is a spiritual hospital. They explain the Lord's Parable of the Good Samaritan as an image of this teaching: the wounded and half-dead man in the story symbolizes the human race, which was rescued by Christ and entrusted to the Church (symbolized by the inn in the story) in order to be cared for by the clergy (who are symbolized by the innkeeper). Even more than healthcare professionals who heal the body, our ministry of spiritual healing is essential to human well-being, our gatherings as the Church are essential, and our Faith is essential, though some civil authorities have refused to acknowledge this.

In the hospital of the Church, the clergy are healers. Yet we all know that clergy are also in need of healing. Even as we exercise this exceedingly difficult ministry of caring for others, we ourselves suffer from spiritual wounds and diseases that need the same care. As St. John Chrysostom says, "More billows toss the priest's soul than the gales which trouble the sea." We must not neglect our own spiritual health for the sake of our calling – this would be shortsighted and self-defeating. As we saw among medical professionals at many times during this crisis, the healer cannot heal when he himself is overcome with illness. So let us listen carefully to His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY's reflections on this theme, and let us take time to reflect on our own spiritual health and that of our parishes. Finally, let us now and at all times seek diligently that healing grace found only in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is alone the cure for all of our deepest infirmities.



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*Reflecting on the Past—Building for the Future*





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# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDAINED

ACKLE, Deacon Peter, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on May 1, 2022, at St. George Church, Troy, Michigan. Fr. Peter is attached to that parish.

AL TURJMAN, Anthony, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on June 26, 2022, at St. Anthony the Great Church, San Diego, California.

ANDERSON, Deacon Basil, to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL on Saturday, June 18, 2022, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. Father Basil is assigned as second priest to the Church of St. Michael the Archangel, Park City, Kansas.

BLOMGREN, Hallvard, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on June 26, 2022, at St. Anthony the Great Church, San Diego, California.

HARJU, Deacon Boniface (Benjamin), to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on June 19, 2022, at the Midwest Diocesan Parish Life Conference hosted by St. George Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is assigned to St. James Church, Williamston, Michigan.

JOHNSON, Deacon Jared, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on June 5, 2022, at St. Ignatius Church, Madison, Wisconsin. He is assigned to St. Nicholas Church, Davenport, Iowa.

JULIANO, Sub-deacon Gerasimos, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on Saturday, June 18, 2022, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. Deacon Gerasimos is assigned as second deacon at the Church of St. John the Forerunner, Cedar Park, Texas.

OLAS, Deacon Joseph, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on April 3, 2022. Fr. Joseph is assigned as assistant pastor at St. George Church, Indianapolis, Indiana.

OWEIS, Deacon Athanasius (Damian), to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on June 12, 2022, at St. George Church, West St. Paul, Minnesota. He is at St. Basil the Great Mission, Bismarck, North Dakota.

VAZQUEZ, (William) John, to the holy diaconate

by Bishop ANTHONY on April 2, 2022. Deacon William is a seminarian at St. Vladimir Seminary, Yonkers, New York.

VEST, Deacon Ephraim, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on May 29, 2022, at the Church of St. Mary, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. He will be completing his third year at St. Tikhon's Seminary in the coming year.

## ELEVATIONS

BABA, Fr. Anthony, *proistamenos* of the Church of St. Anthony the Great, Spring, Texas, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop BASIL on Sunday, April 10, 2022.

BELCHER, Fr. Nicholas, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Metropolitan JOSEPH at St. George, Little Falls, New Jersey, where he is the pastor, on May 22, 2022.

HADDAD, Fr. Ghassan, *proistamenos* of St. George Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop JOHN on July 3, 2022.

HOGG, Fr. John, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop ANTHONY, at Holy Cross Church, Dorrr, Michigan, where he is the pastor, on March 27, 2022.

RIGDEN, Fr. Christopher, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop ALEXANDER on July 3, 2022.

TOUMA, Fr. Elie, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop ALEXANDER on July 3, 2022.

WYATT, Fr. Mark, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop ALEXANDER on May 28, 2022.

## ASSIGNMENTS

ABDEL NOUR, Fr. Gabriel, as assistant pastor of St. George Church, Montreal, Quebec, effective April 15, 2022.

ADILI, Fr. Stephen, to St. Anthony the Great Church, Melbourne, Florida, effective December 15, 2021.

ANDREWS, Fr. Demetrios, as pastor of St.



Augustine of Hippo Church, Denver, Colorado, effective February 8, 2022.

BLAIS, Fr. Jason, as associate pastor of St. Antony Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, effective July 1, 2022.

DAHDOUH, Fr. George, to St. George Church, Houston, Texas, effective February 17, 2022.

FRIZELLE, Fr. Thomas, to St. Basil the Great Church, Kansas City, Kansas, effective August 1, 2022.

HADDAD, Fr. Hanna, as pastor of St. James Church, Poughkeepsie, New York, effective January 26, 2022.

HALSELL, Fr. Symeon, as pastor of St. Athanasius Church, Santa Barbara, effective January 1, 2022.

HAVENS, Fr. Justin, as pastor of St. Xenia of St. Petersburg Church, Payson, Utah, effective January 1, 2022.

JOHNSTON, Fr. Terence, as pastor of Holy Apostles Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky, effective July 1, 2022.

KATRIB, Fr. George, as pastor of St. Mark Church, Irvine, California, effective August 14, 2022.

MILLER, Fr. Thomas, as pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Church, Pomona, California, effective August 1, 2022.

MORIAK, Fr. Matthew, received from the Orthodox Church in America, to St. Barnabas the Apostle Church, Sunbury, Ohio, effective February 9, 2022.

RAMOS, Fr. Seraphim, received from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, as assistant pastor of St. Michael Church, Louisville, Kentucky, effective July 1, 2022.

SAKELLAR, Fr. Theodore, to the Church of the Redeemer, Los Altos Hills, California, effective June 1, 2022.

SLAUGHTER DOTY, Fr. Justin, as assistant pastor of Three Hierarchs Church, Wenatchee, Washington, effective February 1, 2022.

TRUEBENBACH, Fr. Paul, as pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, effective January 1, 2022.

## RETIRED

HUGHES, Fr. Edward, effective August 1, 2022.

LAFFOON, Fr. Michael, effective August 14, 2022.

NASR, Fr. Elias, effective September 1, 2022.

O'GRADY, Fr. Patrick, effective August 1, 2022.

SPEIER, Fr. Nicholas, effective January 1, 2022.

## REPOSED

V. Rev. Stephanos FARAHAT, 63, on Friday, May 27, 2022. Fr. Stephanos was the pastor of St. James Church, Placentia, California. He leaves his Khouria Rajaa, children and grandchildren.

Khouria Grace Bishara ASWAD, on April 17, 2022. Khouria Grace, of Grand Island, New York, passed on at her home under the care of her family and Hospice Buffalo. Grace loved her family and friends dearly and found the most joy in being surrounded by those she loved and serving them. Her love knew no limits. She embodied joy and brought happiness and a smile to all who knew or met her.

Grace was born on Friday, April 13, 1934, in Niagara Falls, New York, to the late Bishara and Najla (Haick) Bishara. The eldest of five children, she loved caring for her younger siblings and enjoyed working in her parents' store on Ontario Avenue in Niagara Falls, New York. In 1955, Grace graduated from Niagara Falls High School and gained employment at National Carbon as an administrative secretary. On February 10, 1957, Grace married the love of her life, the late Very Rev. Fr. George (Richard) Aswad (+January 2014). Together, they bought a plot of land and built their first home in Grand Island, New York. Over the years, Grace and Richard built two other homes on Grand Island, where they raised their family of five daughters, ten grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Grace was an integral member of St. George Orthodox Church in Niagara Falls, where her husband served as the priest for 35 years. Grace was the choir director at St. George for 60 years, taught Sunday School, and directed several children's musical programs. Children brought Grace endless joy, and she loved sharing her musical talents with them. As a musician, Grace was instrumental in the development of the Sacred Music Institute for the Archdiocese and was the choir director for the Archdiocese Convention choirs. She had a beautiful voice and was a professional singer within her

community. She sang for the troops and participated in local musical theater productions. Her performance of “O Holy Night” on Christmas Eve was a beloved tradition at St. George Church. For her significant contributions, Grace was awarded the Antiochian Gold Medal of Merit and was crowned Queen of Midwest SOYO; she was also an officer and member of the Antiochian Women of North America.

A three-time cancer survivor, Grace was an active participant in the Grand Island Relay for Life. She performed at the Relay for Life several times and was chosen as the Honorary Survivor in 2016. Grace is survived by five daughters, Lynn Wood (George), Laura Colyer (Jeff), Louise Snyder (William), Lisa Dudley (Michael), and Lana Dudley; ten grandchildren, Jessica (Tracy), Jeana, Matthew, Andrew, Ryan (of blessed memory), Rachel, Kara, Eric, Amber, and Alyssa; two great grandchildren, Andrew and Jeffrey; a sister Judy Manoukian (late Jack), a brother Kamil Bishara (Carol); and also many nieces and nephews. She was the sister of the late William (late Diane) and Joseph Bishara.

Fr. John ESSA, 82, on July 2, 2022. Fr. John retired from Ss. Constantine and Helen Church, Carrollton, Texas. He is survived by Khouria Laila, their children John, Joanne, and Julian, and three grandsons.

Khouria Angelina Marie KEISER, on Saturday, May 21, 2022. Khouria Angelina was the widow of the Very Rev. Fr. Michael Keiser. Archpriest Michael served at St. Antony Orthodox Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was the former Chair of the Department of Missions and Evangelism. He fell asleep in Christ at the age of 73, having served in the holy priesthood for forty-four years. Khouria Angelina was also predeceased by her son, Daniel Keiser. She is survived by her daughter Natalie Vanbuskirk and her granddaughter Brittany Griswold (Jake).

Mr. Robert H. LAHAM, 94, on Wednesday, May 25, 2022. A former member and Treasurer of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees, “Bob” and his family had been longtime members of St. George Church of Boston (West Roxbury), Massachusetts. Members of Mr. Laham’s family have served on the Board of Trustees for three generations. His father, Monsour Laham, served as Vice-Chairman under His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory. His daughter, Ms. Carol Laham, is currently a board member and his cousin, Mr. Gregory

Laham, is an honorary member. His son, Mr. Kenneth Laham, served on the board from 2001–05. For many years, Bob and his wife, Gladys, provided financial scholarships for contestants in the Archdiocese’s annual oratorical festival. They have also been generous benefactors of the Archdiocese and its ministries. Bob and Gladys had been life members of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch, and their three children are also members. For more than twenty years, Bob was also the chairman of the Antiochian Village Council. He had a great love for the Camp and the children, and helped to grow the program exponentially through the years. In 2017, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH honored Bob for his lifetime of service with the Gold Order of St. Raphael of Brooklyn.

Rt. Rev. Duane PEDERSON, 83, on July 20, 2022. Fr. Duane was the beloved founder of the Archdiocese’s prison ministry. He was known as a gentle, compassionate man who brought Jesus Christ to many prisoners and homeless people, and taught Orthodox Christians to understand that ministry to them was ministry to our Lord.

“He was the friend of all, and he never had any agenda,” His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH told the ongoing Clergy Symposium about Fr. Duane. “If you didn’t know Fr. Duane, you wouldn’t know the meaning of the priesthood. He may not have known most of the services, but he became like the prisoners he served. He served them and loved them to the best of his ability. Duane never complained about their behavior. He would say that these are good souls who want to be better people and to be saved. He prayed for them and cried for them. He adopted many of them as his spiritual children. Fr. Duane loved the prisoners. If you as priests don’t love your people, then you will not do well in your parishes. Fr. Duane spent countless years to minister to them to heal them.”

Before he became Orthodox, Fr. Duane created a street ministry in Hollywood, California, as a leader of the Jesus People Movement. He brought his God-given gifts to the Antiochian Archdiocese, and His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory ordained Fr. Duane to the priesthood in 1991. Eight years later, Metropolitan JOSEPH, when he was Bishop of Los Angeles and the West, elevated Fr. Duane to the dignity of Archimandrite.

In 2005, with Metropolitan PHILIP's blessing, Fr. Duane founded Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry. OCPM considers him to be "the father of Orthodox prison ministry in the United States," adding, "his founding influence is still essential to the current work of OCPM."

In addition to his ministry, Fr. Duane also assisted three churches in California: St. Nicholas Cathedral of Los Angeles, St. Matthew Church of Torrance, and Holy Cross Church of Palmdale. Fr. Duane had retired to his home state of Minnesota, where he served at St. George Church of West St. Paul. In 2016, Fr. Duane was awarded the Archdiocese's Silver Order of St. Raphael of Brooklyn.

#### METROPOLITAN JOSEPH SHARES GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE ANTIOCHIAN HOUSE OF STUDIES

We are very pleased to announce that on June 7, 2022, the Antiochian House of Studies received full accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) to offer the following degrees:

- Master of Divinity
- Master of Theological Studies
- Master of Pastoral Care and Counseling
- Doctor of Ministry
- Doctor of Philosophy.

We congratulate the V. Rev. Father Michel Najim (President), the Rt. Rev. Father Fadi Rabbat (Academic Dean) and the V. Rev. Father Joseph Purpura (Accreditation Director), and all the officers, faculty, staff, the AHOS Board of Trustees, alumni, and students of the Antiochian House of Studies for this outstanding achievement in the life of the school and in the life of our Archdiocese and Orthodoxy across North America. The Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) was founded in 1980 as the St. Stephens Program of Studies. Over the past several decades, AHOS has developed into a full-fledged school, offering another option for the education and pastoral formation of students who are preparing themselves for priesthood and for Church ministries within the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America and beyond. Today, with over two hundred students presently enrolled, the Antiochian House of Studies is now a fully accredited Graduate School of Theology.

We encourage all the priests and parishes to support the work of this Orthodox Theological School

(<https://tahos.org>) financially and participate in its life. We ask clergy to encourage the faithful of your parish to consider supporting it by various means, and to invite your faithful to participate in one of the degree programs. We ask that you offer your prayers as well as your parish's financial support for this school. I do designate the First Sunday of the Dormition Fast as a Sunday to support the Antiochian House of Studies. On that day a collection tray will be passed. The collection tray will be sent to Antiochian Archdiocese (earmarked AHOS). Individuals may make your tax-deductible online donation by entering this link into your browser: <https://tithe.ly/give?c=5322090>, or by mailing your check, payable to The Antiochian House of Studies, 1020 Baseline Road, La Verne, CA 91750. For more information or to make large donations, you may contact the Very Reverend Joseph Antypas, Vice President of Business Development, at [frjoseph.antypas@tahos.org](mailto:frjoseph.antypas@tahos.org).

#### METROPOLITAN JOSEPH PARTICIPATES IN FUNERAL OF METROPOLITAN HILARION OF ROCOR

On Saturday, May 21, 2022, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH served at the funeral of His Eminence Metropolitan HILARION, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. Accompanying Sayidna JOSEPH at ROCOR's Synodal Cathedral of the Mother of God of the Sign in Manhattan, New York, were the Archdiocese's *Protosyngellos*, Fr. Jeremy Davis, and Vicar General, Fr. Thomas Zain.

The website of ROCOR reports that His Eminence Metropolitan MARK of Berlin and Germany officiated in the service, co-served by members of the Synod of Bishops. Joining them were hierarchs and clergy of the various Orthodox Christian jurisdictions.

In his letter of condolence, Sayidna JOSEPH had praised Vladyka HILARION as "a man of faith, integrity, and principle."

#### THE SAINT CONSTANTINE SCHOOL NAMES LIBRARY FOR METROPOLITAN JOSEPH

*(Sub-deacon Peter Samore;*

*Photos by Sub-deacon Elio Nicolas)*

"This honor in my name is for the entire Archdiocese."





On Thursday, May 12, **The Saint Constantine School and College** honored His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH by naming the library on its Houston, Texas, campus for him.

“On the plane, it kills me because I don’t see

books in the hands of people anymore,” Sayidna JOSEPH said at the dedication. “Passengers are connected and addicted to social media. I love to see books and people reading books. “Let us go back to the origin – the books that give us knowledge. Our minds and memories will be different and healed.”

In honor of the occasion, the school’s president, Dr. John Mark Reynolds, commissioned and presented to Sayidna JOSEPH a hand-painted icon of the school’s patron, St. Constantine the Great, and His Eminence’s patron, St. Joseph of Arimathea.

“It is the suffering and the glory of the Cross that unites these two great saints, and it is the suffering and glory of the Cross to which each of us is called,”





Dr. Reynolds said in his address. “May this library be a place where, despite the uncertainty of the future, students faithfully serve Christ, learning to bear burdens, to suffer, to work, and to experience the beauty and the crosses of life with strength of character.”

Mrs. Megan Mueller, the school’s director of strategy and communications, led His Eminence on a tour of the seven-acre campus and showed him the plans for future growth. Joining them were Mr. Fawaz El-Khoury, the Vice Chairman of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees, along with trustees Mr. Elias Shaheen and Mr. Nick Massad, Jr.

Sayidna JOSEPH met sixth-grader Stephen Wilson, who started the Saint Cuthbert charity group. Since last fall, he and other students have conducted various fundraisers to raise money for the Star of Hope and Hurricane Ida relief. In the spring, the group hosted three spirit-day pizza lunches and raised money for the Archdiocese’s program, Food for Hungry People (FFHP). Stephen presented His Eminence with a check for \$1,000 for FFHP from the students. Sayidna JOSEPH was so proud of them!

After the tour and dedication, His Eminence participated in the graduation exercises of the Orthodox Christian school for K-12 and collegiate studies.

“Education here is not just about information, but about formation of the soul; it is focused not just on acquiring knowledge, but on seeking wisdom,” he told the graduates and students in his address. “Through your studies you have come into contact with our Lord Jesus Christ, His apostles and saints, and a host of other teachers from across the ages. You have learned from them not just an accumulation of data, but an appreciation for the human condition, as well as its redemption through Christ. This enlightened perspective is the greatest gift you have

received during your years here, and now you are called to share it with our world.”

Sayidna JOSEPH was pleased to present a \$15,000 donation to the school on behalf of the Archdiocese. The Levant Foundation generously gave \$250,000 to the school in honor of His Eminence.

## METROPOLITAN JOSEPH AT ST. GEORGE CHURCH, HOUSTON, TEXAS

“Pascha must stay with us because it is the foundation of our Church and our Faith. If Jesus has not



risen from the dead, our faith, mission and ministry would be in vain. Our Faith was established on this foundation.”

On Wednesday, May 11, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH presided over Daily Vespers at St. George Church of Houston, Texas. Welcoming him were the pastor, Fr. James Shadid, assistant pastor, Fr. George Katrib, and the clergy and faithful from the parish and the Houston area.

Sayidna JOSEPH preached about the importance of keeping the resurrection of Christ in our lives long after the celebration of Pascha. “Theology is not about many words. It’s about one sentence: Christ is risen! It has all the meaning and substance





over death and sin,” His Eminence said. “If this line cannot heal me, or you, or Orthodox Christians, then there is something wrong. Pascha is not a little thing in our life.”

## METROPOLITAN JOSEPH CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL OF CANTON CHURCH

*(Sub-deacon Elio Nicolas; photos by Marilyn Kanam, Duke Kanam, and Liz Macris)*

“In the first 100 years, the seeds were planted and they blossomed. They became you. You are the result of the labor of your forefathers. I am so happy for you.”

From May 6 to 8, 2022, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led the centennial celebrations of St. George Church, Canton, Ohio. Joining him was His Grace Bishop ANTHONY of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest. The pastor, Fr. Michael Corbin, and the faithful welcomed both hierarchs and all the visiting clergy and laity.

On Saturday morning, May 7, His Eminence and His Grace met with the Sunday School children, Teen SOYO, young adults and their parents. The youngest of the children asked questions like: “Why did death come into the world?” “How did Satan become so bad?” and “If Jesus is God’s Son, how can He also be Mary’s Father?” The hierarchs answered them, after which Sayidna JOSEPH said

that he had never heard such challenging questions, even in a seminary.

On Saturday night, following Great Vespers, the church hosted a celebratory banquet in which Bea Shaheen McPherson, the oldest member of the community at age 100, gave the toast. His Eminence welcomed the Mayor of Canton, Thomas M. Bernabei, who in his speech emphasized how St. George Church has had a great, positive impact on the community, and on his life personally as well. His Eminence also presented Certificates of Meritorious Service from the Archdiocese to parishioners Rosemary Shaheen and Timothy Wires.

On Sunday morning, May 8, in his homily, Sayidna JOSEPH emphasized that “I did not come here to celebrate the walls and the ceiling and the icons. I came here to celebrate your faith.”

He called upon the clergy and faithful to continue to be courageous witnesses for Jesus Christ, just like their ancestors who opened St. George Church. As examples, His Eminence cited the saints that the Orthodox Church celebrates on the third Sunday of Pascha: The Myrrh-bearing Women, Joseph of Arimathea (Sayidna JOSEPH’s patron saint) and Nicodemus.

“St. Joseph had the courage to talk to Pontius Pilate and said, ‘Give me the body of Jesus.’ Pilate did not reject his request. Every Sunday, you are Joseph, because you take holy communion. You take the body of Christ like Joseph took Christ’s body from the cross – with faith, respect and hope.

“The Myrrh-bearing Women were the courageous disciples. The other disciples like Peter were afraid and ran. The women were not afraid, and even went to the tomb of Jesus. We cannot be controlled by fear, sin and temptation.”

The brick walls and icons of St. George Church area already up, but Sayidna JOSEPH reminded the clergy and faithful that they have much to build over the next 100 years: their homes, their society, and their lives in Christ.

Following the homily, the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful wished “many years” for His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch and All the East on his patronal feast day. St. John the Theologian is commemorated on May 8, which this year coincided with the third Sunday of Pascha.







### METROPOLITAN JOSEPH VISITS TROY, MICHIGAN

*(Story and photos by Sub-deacon Elio Nicolas)*

"I want you to save souls. If they hate you, if they don't receive you, if they don't reciprocate your love, don't give up. Pray for them, and keep knocking on their doors."

On Sunday, May 1, 2022, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH ordained Deacon Peter Ackle to the holy priesthood at St. George Church of Troy, Michigan. Fr. Peter is attached to that parish.

His Eminence and His Grace Bishop ANTHONY of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest were warmly received by the pastor of St. George, Fr. Joseph Antypas, the parish council and the faithful. In his homily, Sayidna JOSEPH talked about the importance of unity within a church

community, and unity among sister parishes within the same area.

On Saturday, April 30, the hierarchs met with the Antiochian Women, Sunday School teachers, and Teen SOYO for question-and-answer sessions. His Eminence discussed the importance of confession and repentance as healing for the soul, just like medicine is healing for the body. Sayidna JOSEPH told the faithful that the sacrament first comes with the realization that we committed something wrong, and then having the will to change ourselves, leading to renewal, restoration and salvation.

Next, His Eminence presided over the meeting of the clergy of the Southeast Michigan Deanery. Later that day, he presided over Great Vespers. That night, he awarded Certificates of Meritorious Service from the Archdiocese to Mrs. Patricia Elian, Dr. Haifa Fakhouri, Mrs. Randa Nasr, Mr. Neal Norgrove, Mrs. Anita Pollock and Mr. George Semaan.

### MEMORY ETERNAL! ARCHBISHOP PAUL (ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA)

*In the early morning hours of Great and All-holy Pascha, April 24, His Eminence Archbishop PAUL (Gassios) of the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of the Midwest fell asleep in the Lord. On Bright Tuesday, April 26, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, leader of the Antiochian Archdiocese, sent a letter of condolence to His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON, leader of the OCA.*

Bright Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Your Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON, and Your Eminences and Graces, our beloved Brother Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church in America, Reverend Clergy and Christ-loving Faithful of the O.C.A. Diocese of the Midwest,

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

Today, as we continue celebrating the glorious and holy Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we also mourn the absence of our beloved brother and concelebrant, His Eminence, the Most Reverend Archbishop PAUL. God has given us a blessed consolation in the date of his departure from this life: Great and Holy Pascha, when we joyfully sing, "From death to life and from earth to heaven has Christ our God led us as we sing the song of victory!" The Lord has indeed led Archbishop PAUL from death to life and from earth to heaven, to a blessedness beyond all sickness, sorrow, and sighing.



This humble and joyful soul was an example of the self-giving love that defines our lives as Christians and our ministry as hierarchs and clergy. He was an archpastor who always had a smile and an edifying word for those who came to him. He was well-loved and respected and will be missed, not only in the Orthodox Church in America, but also in the Assembly of Bishops and throughout the Orthodox churches of this land. We pray that he will now be an intercessor for us and for Orthodoxy in this land before the throne of God.

Patriarch ELIAS IV, of thrice-blessed memory, once said that a hierarch does not die but receives that blessing earnestly sought by the psalmist who cried out, “Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly away and be at rest?” (54:7). Having ascended on the dove-like wings of the Holy Spirit, Archbishop PAUL is now at peace in the Kingdom of Christ, where his archpastoral heart continues to pour forth loving concern for his flock.

Joined by my brother hierarchs, the reverend clergy, esteemed trustees, and pious faithful of our Archdiocese, I offer sincere condolences on the passing into eternal life of that well-beloved shepherd, Archbishop PAUL. May his memory be eternal! And may God grant comfort to all who mourn him.

# FIRST CHURCH IN ARCHDIOCESE NAMED FOR LIFE-GIVING SPRING PREPARES FOR FEAST DAY SUB-DEACON PETER SAMORE

The Life-Giving Spring of water in the district of Valouki, Constantinople, has produced thousands of miracles, healings, and resurrections since it first welled up in the Fifth Century. A church was built on the site in honor of the Most-holy Theotokos because she brought forth Life: her Son and our God, Jesus Christ. Now, the Antiochian Archdiocese’s first church named for the Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring prepared to celebrate its feast day on Bright Friday – April 29, 2022.

Virgin Mary Life-Giving Spring Church in —Bakersfield, California ([virginmarybakersfield.org](http://virginmarybakersfield.org)) is growing and bringing more families to the Orthodox faith under the spiritual care of the pastor, Fr. Paul Marji. He and the dedicated parish leaders are actively looking to purchase existing commercial property to serve the community famed for its oil, agriculture, and “Bakersfield Sound” of country music.

The Life-Giving Spring Church in Constantinople (now Istanbul) was destroyed several times over the centuries, only to be rebuilt and preserve the stream of water that produces miracles to this day. The community in Bakersfield has made several attempts over the years to establish a church. Even after setbacks, by the intercessions of the Mother of God, the Bakersfield church has now taken hold and stands strongly as a witness to our Savior.





# SEXUALLY FRANTIC? YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

Fr. John Oliver

CAN A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION WELCOME INTO ITS MIDST ANY PERSON WHO IDENTIFIES AS LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER, FEMININE-OF-CENTER, MASCULINE-PRESENTING OR ANY OF THE OTHER IDENTITIES ON THE GROWING LIST OF OPTIONS? HOW MUCH OF THE "MODERN FLESH" CAN WE RECEIVE INTO THIS "ANCIENT FAITH"? MAYBE IT DEPENDS ON WHAT ONE MEANS BY *WELCOME*.



In February, 2021, the Congress of the United States of America passed bill HR 5, also called *The Equality Act*. Its purpose? "To prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation," and, "to prohibit the Religious

Freedom Restoration Act of 1993

from providing a claim, defense, or basis for challenging these new protections." Slinking in the cultural shadows until recently, these issues now thrust themselves into the central marketplace of ideas. How is the Christian to respond?

In East Nashville, Tennessee, we find a set of shops offering various goods and services some of the population finds appealing. Found here is an art supply shop, a yoga studio, a dance center, a bakery of breads and sweets, the headquarters of a social justice organization, and a center for acupuncture. Taped to the door of the acupuncture studio hangs a sign with these words written in bright rainbow colors: "All religions; all creeds; all genders; all sexual orientations, are welcome. You are safe here."

The sign stood out in the mind of one man walking the halls of this plaza of modernity. As he walked by the studio and glanced at the sign, then made his way to his car, he thought to himself, "I

wonder if a sign like that could ever be placed on the door of an Orthodox Christian church." All religions; all creeds; all genders; all sexual orientations, are welcome. You are safe here. After some thought, the man reasoned that, yes, it could – a sign like that could be placed on the door of an Orthodox Church, not far from the "Welcome" painted on the church sign near the road. Like so much of the language we Americans use today, however, a church could post that same sign, use those same words in that same order, but mean something qualitatively different by them.

Remember the New Testament story of the swine on the hill? Those details always catch our attention: the wild, demon-possessed man (What did he look like? What did he act like? Was he disgusting?); the falling down before the feet of Christ (Was it dramatic? Theatrical?); the steep bank leading to the lake (How steep? How long?); and, of course, the pulsing herd of frantic swine rushing headlong into the water, stirring up foam and froth.

When interpreting this passage, those of a punitive constitution might ask, Why did Christ send the *swine* into the water and not the *sinner*? If the man himself was such a scandal in the area, causing such wrenching fear to those passing by and prohibiting the safe use of that area, why not cast the person headlong into the lake instead of the pigs, and be done with it – a form of capital punishment for really threatening behavior? It's decisive. It's clean. It's strong leadership. Why the swine and not the sinner?



For an answer to that, we recall the well-known insight of St. John of Kronstadt, the 19th-century Russian priest: “Never confuse the person formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him; because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.”

Notice how the saint distinguishes between a *person* and the *passions*. Among the greatest contributions of Christianity to culture is an optimistic vision of the human being: You are not your passions; you are not your sin. You suffer from passions, sure, and sometimes those passions do get the best of you by bringing out the worst in you. But your *true* self – the *you* you’d presumably like to see more often – is not captured inside any of its broken expressions. Even though you have days when you feel and act pig-like, you are not your passions. Did you notice that, in that story, the *man* was worth saving, not the *madness*? Christ knew exactly what He was doing.

When a person long plagued by illness finally goes to the doctor, a good doctor may lead with a question like this: “Are you willing to give up all that has been making you sick?” Some patients will say, No, just prescribe the pill, deal the drug, get me on my way.

Other patients, however, might be open to some discussion about lifestyle choices – about the quality of their food and drink, about their activity or inactivity, about any bad habits or sedentary patterns that are contributing to sickness. “Are you willing to lay those aside for healthier choices? Let’s save the body, not the behavior. Let’s save the man by discarding the madness.”

In the first chapter of the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul gives a long list that reads like a medical chart of the spiritual sicknesses that plague our world right now. His list contains about thirty-five spiritual pandemics – from envy, murder, and deceit, to gossiping, slandering, and faithlessness. It’s not pretty, but it is truthful, and healing begins with the truth.

We have heard the metaphor that the Church is “a hospital for sinners.” So, going to church expecting to find perfect people is like going to a hospital expecting to find healthy people. The Church opens its doors and welcomes all persons who are plagued with any illness that Paul enumerates in Romans 1.

Sick with envy? You are welcome here? Sick with greed? You are welcome here. Sick with gossiping or vanity? You are welcome here.

Going down Paul’s list, we welcome everyone. Sick with ungodliness or unrighteousness? You are welcome here. Sick from pride or disobedience or hatred? You are welcome here. Sick with foolishness or mean-spiritedness or a habit of lying? You are welcome here. Sick with an unnatural attraction to members of your own sex? You are welcome here.

All of these, the holy Church welcomes. It’s right there on the sign: All religions; all creeds; all genders; all sexual orientations, are welcome. You are safe here.

Ahh, but that is the key, isn’t it? A church could post that same sign, use those same words in that same order, but mean something different by them. *You* are safe here – that’s the key. *You* are safe here – the *you* that is not your sickness; the *you* that is not your passions; the *you* that is not your sin; the *you* that you really should be searching for, the *you* yearning to break free. You are safe here. If not ideologically rigid, but simply open to being changed, you are welcome here.

Whatever has been keeping you sick, however, is not: your passions are not safe here, your sin is not safe here, your madness, or despair, or immorality, or inflated ego are not safe here. Our dear patient, whatever has been keeping you spiritually sick is not safe here. Hell is not a morgue we want to send anyone to.

Isn’t Christ compassionate? Yes, thankfully. Yet the *compassion of* Christ is identical to the *liberation by* Christ: He comes to recover, to restore, to reclaim the real you. His compassion on us brings freedom from sin and death. So, yes, a church is happy to welcome the dead, but not so that they remain dead. A church welcomes the dead so that they may receive life, and life more abundantly.

Life to the dead, health to the sick, freedom to the captive, sanity to the disturbed, peace to the unsettled, joy to the downcast, hope to the despairing, holistic calm to the sexually frantic. Come on in, because *you* are welcome here.

Fr. John Oliver



# HOMELESS SHELTER NAMED FOR ORTHODOX CHAPLAIN



On February 8, 2022, the Santa Barbara (California) County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a nomination to rename the County-owned El Colegio Property (a homeless shelter) the “Hedges House of Hope,” in honor of the V. Rev. Fr. Jon-Stephen Hedges, who reposed in the Lord on February 25, 2021.

The Hedges House of Hope program provides shelter operations, essential services, case management, housing navigation, public health, and behavioral health services, and links to substance-use-disorder treatment services, with the objective of linking individuals to a permanent or safe housing resource.

The V. Rev. Jon-Stephen Hedges was attached to St. Athanasius Antiochian Orthodox Church in Santa Barbara from 1987 until he reposed in the Lord in 2021, serving as assistant pastor for part of that time. Fr. Jon-Stephen served as a chaplain with the County of Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Department and the Isla Vista Foot Patrol, and worked with a number of community service agencies, including Doctors Without Walls, American Red Cross, and various County departments, particularly those that provided services and protection for the most vulnerable populations. Fr. Jon-Stephen was also trained as a board-certified crisis chaplain with the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, and was a Certified Trauma Responder (CTR) and Emergency Medical Technician. His training made him uniquely qualified to meet the needs of the unhoused residents in his community, and to advocate actively for them, as well as to serve with I.O.C.C. as a chaplain who was deployed to numerous sites of natural disaster. He helped develop St. Brigid Fellowship, a ministry of St. Athanasius parish that serves the unsheltered community, and he supported the Isla Vista Temporary Emergency Shelter and Navigation Center. He also strongly advocated for the development of a permanent South County Navigation Center, which resulted in the facility and program which now bear his name.

Fr. Jon-Stephen’s sudden repose was a huge loss to his family, his parish, his I.O.C.C. team members, the unsheltered community and the entire County of Santa Barbara. Memorializing him in the community he served for over 40 years by naming this shelter the “Hedges House of Hope” is an honor befitting the servant that he was. He is worthy! Memory eternal!



# AN UNEXPECTED SILVER LINING: GOD'S ANSWER

Recently, an un-anticipated blessing occurred while I was visiting my wife in a memory care community. (She has Alzheimer's Disease.) For the past few years, I had prayed to God and the Theotokos to be merciful to her. I would visit her each day around the lunch or dinner hour to spend time with her. We would stroll outside, weather permitting, holding hands, listening to music we liked, and especially hugging and kissing. After lunch or dinner, we would stroll again and sit on a bench and she would cuddle up with me. We were still husband and wife despite her memory loss.

It was good for me and I am certain it was good for her.

The unexpected blessing occurred when I realized that we were more intimate in these two hours each day than we had been in our married lives. God was answering my prayers in His own way. We were continuing to become one flesh. I would look into her eyes and she would look into mine. We told each other several times that we loved each other. In our fifty-six years of married life we rarely were this close.

Once Ginny was admitted to the memory care community, I became aware of how much I had taken her for granted. She did the shopping, cooking, laundry, ironing, bill paying, and other household chores, as well as raising four children. I cut the grass, took out the trash, and earned the money. Once her dementia set in, I had to assume some of these responsibilities, and when she was placed in the memory facility, I had to take on the entire

The morning prayer of the Holy Elders of Optima

O Lord, grant that I may meet all that this coming day brings to me with spiritual tranquility. Grant that I may fully surrender myself to Thy holy will. At every hour of this day, direct and support me in all things. Whatever news may reach me in the course of the day, teach me to accept it with a calm soul and the firm conviction that all is subject to Thy holy will. Guide my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions. In all unexpected occurrences, let me not forget that all is sent down from Thee. Grant me to deal in a straightforward and wise manner with every member of my family, neither embarrassing nor saddening anyone. O Lord, grant me power to endure the fatigue of the coming day and all the events that will take place during it. Guide my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love. Amen.

gamut of household responsibilities. Had she not contracted dementia, we would have continued as we were with no understanding on my part of how much she meant to me.

I can now look into her eyes, as I rarely did before, tell her I love her and see her smile. What joy! It is like we are wooing all over again.

In the Morning Prayer of the Elders of Optima there is a line about accepting all that comes our way with calmness, and a recognition that all that happens is God's

will. I accepted that thought intellectually. Now, I see it as God's will that Ginny's condition has allowed me before I die to acknowledge Ginny in a new light.

There is a silver lining. God's love is ever present.

Fr. Michael Massouh



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## The Children's Relief Fund



I greet you on behalf of all the children of the **Children's Relief Fund (CRF)**, past and present. We pray that you receive this letter in their gratitude and appreciation for the love and concern you have shown them in our Lord's name. We pray for your continued health and prosperity in this New Year.

This letter brings you our *"2022 New Year Appeal."* The purpose of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is to provide funds for the children in need in Lebanon and Palestine, and the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The **CRF**, under the *"Department of Charitable Outreach,"* has been a godsend to hundreds of needy children and their families. We are so proud and privileged to help and support them financially – but more importantly, to show them our love and concern.

We will continue to assist these children, just as we have since the Fund's inception in 1983. We have provided close to **4 million dollars** in aid, but we can't do it alone. Your past participation has brought much joy to so many young suffering innocents. ***100% of your donation goes directly to the sponsored child and no money is used for administrative services.***

You can help change the life of a child by being a sponsor for as little as \$400 a year, just \$7.69 per week, \$1.10 per day. Donations in any amount are always welcome. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you their name, age, address, and a brief biography. Your child will correspond with you, sending you letters and pictures about their life. You will be able to develop a special bond and personal relationship with them.

***Your assistance will improve the lives of these children and give them a chance for a better future.***

For those of you who are already sponsoring a child, we



offer you our most profound thanks. Please continue your love and support. New sponsors are encouraged to open a window of concern and join this humanitarian effort to lift the burden off these children.

In anticipation of your kind response, we thank you for your generosity, and pray you enjoy the New Year with health, happiness, and prosperity. May God bless you and yours and give you strength in the coming days.

Deborah Brown  
CRF Administrator  
(917) 991-7192

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