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# THE WORD

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# THE WORD

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# METROPOLITAN JOSEPH'S ADDRESS

AT THE VIRTUAL ARCHDIOCESAN CONVENTION  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

SATURDAY, JULY 24, 2021

BELOVED HIERARCHS, REVEREND CLERGY, ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, ORGANIZATION AND DEPARTMENT HEADS, BELOVED HIERARCHS, REVEREND CLERGY, ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, ORGANIZATION AND DEPARTMENT HEADS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

## CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST!

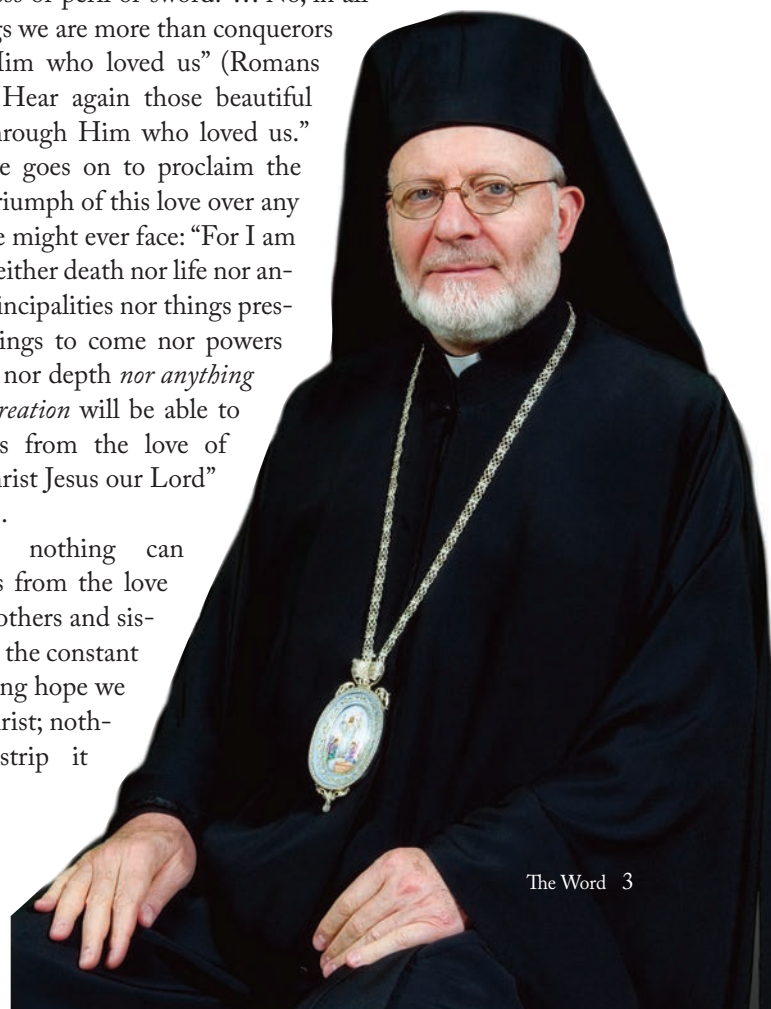
After all that we have endured over the past year and a half, this traditional greeting now means so much more. COVID-19 brought sickness, death, and grief to many families around the world. As we now emerge from the pandemic, God willing, we must not forget the more than four million people who died from this disease globally, and the multitude of families and friends who have mourned the loss of loved ones. Others suffered the loss of jobs and homes, the disruption of their children's education, and a growing emotional burden of loneliness and depression – not to mention the curtailment of our parish life – as a consequence of governmental efforts to control the disease. The resulting social upheaval was compounded by disagreement and discord throughout our cities. Beyond angry words and public demonstrations, violence has become rampant in the public square. Our world has in so many ways been upended and broken by these trying times.

Nevertheless, Christ is in our midst, and He has been with us through all these things. The Ninth Ode of Pascha proclaims: "O Thy divine and beloved and most sweet voice! Thou hast promised that Thou would be with us unto the end of the world, O Christ; and we faithful rejoice, having this as an anchor of hope." Indeed, insofar as we have been able to turn to Him in the midst of this ordeal,

we have rejoiced in the hope of His constant, preserving, and redeeming presence.

Saint Paul expressed the same joyful hope, when he was facing far greater sufferings. He wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37). Hear again those beautiful words: "Through Him who loved us." The apostle goes on to proclaim the universal triumph of this love over any obstacle we might ever face: "For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth *nor anything else in all creation* will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38–39).

Indeed, nothing can separate us from the love of God, brothers and sisters. This is the constant and enduring hope we have in Christ; nothing can strip it



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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from us if we hold fast to it. This is the shining beacon that will lead us out of hopelessness. This is the warmth of renewal that will overcome the unfeeling coldness taking hold of our world. This is the Bread of Life that will revitalize souls enfeebled by fear.

The Church has proven the steadfastness of Christ's love through all it has endured over its two-thousand-year history. Instead of stamping out the Gospel, Jewish and Roman persecutions only increased the spread of the Faith, as the blood of martyrs became the seed of the Church. Instead of disfiguring the Faith beyond recognition, the assault of heresies led the Fathers to eloquently articulate it in a way that has inspired every generation since. Instead of stripping our churches of their beauty, iconoclasm provoked an enduring zeal among us who love the beauty of God's House and the holy icons. Instead of crushing the Christian spirit, the Turkish yoke deepened the resolve of our faithful forebears, and spread the Faith here to the New World. Instead of extinguishing the Orthodox faith in the Soviet Union and other Communist nations in the name of a new, idealistic form of an economic and social experiment, in which the government becomes the god and source of all things, our holy Orthodox faith ultimately prevailed and is once again the spiritual anchor of those same nations.

The devil cannot overcome the word of the Gospel which has come forth from God. This powerful word will have its saving effect in spite of all adversity, as God Himself proclaimed through the Prophet Isaiah, saying: "As rain comes down, or snow from heaven, and does not return until it saturates the earth, and it brings forth and produces and gives seed to the sower and bread for food, so shall My word be, whatever proceeds from My mouth. It shall not return until it accomplishes whatever I willed" (55:10-11). Only laziness and indifference on our part can stymie the salvation God intends for us, which He sent forth His Word to accomplish for us. Nothing external to us can harm us; only our free choice to reject God's work in our lives can do so. So long as we cooperate with God and obey His teachings, we will know the love that God has for us, and will abide in that love, and be perfected in that love.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is an opportune moment for the Church. We must resist the temptation to withdraw and lick our wounds. Instead, we must redouble our efforts to proclaim this powerful word of the Gospel in a world that desperately needs it. We have already seen many new inquirers in our parishes, as this tumultuous time has led people to search for meaning and hope – a spiritual anchor to keep them safe in the chaotic storms of life. The overturning of the status quo has created an opportunity for people to break loose from materialistic and secular preoccupations, in order to find a better path to walk. We know that the Church has what they seek. So, we ought now to proclaim with even more gusto the way of Christ and the wisdom of the Fathers.

This is an opportunity for renewal not just for those outside the Church but also for us within it. Many of us have also been shaken from our status quo and prompted to dig deeper. Being forced to stay at home, we have spent more time with family and in prayer. We have figured out new ways to reach out in love to hurting people around us. We have been forced to rediscover that the Church is not merely a building, but also, and especially, a living spirit within each of us that can worship and pray wherever we are in our daily lives. Don't lose these precious lessons! Continue to apply them, by making prayer, family time, and Christian service the cornerstone of your daily lives.

I myself have learned so much through this time about myself and my ministry.



As some of you have heard me say, I was transformed overnight from a Metropolitan of three hundred churches and missions all over the United States and Canada, to a “parish” priest of my home chapel, personally serving only four or five parishioners, for more than a year. This was an opportunity for me to minister at a much more intense and personal level and to see my ministry again from this more basic perspective. I have also been able to take more time to read books, while stuck at home and unable to visit all of you. Although unable to travel as usual, during this time I remained in contact with the hierarchs, clergy and faithful, both here and abroad through Zoom meetings and other ways. No doubt you have all had similar moments and experiences as you’ve been forced to slow down and simplify your daily lives. Let us cherish these lessons as gifts from God, so that they will bear the fruit of ongoing spiritual renewal in us, as God intends.

Our parishes have faced the challenge of COVID-19 with courage and creativity, and I want to thank our hierarchs, clergy and lay leaders for all the efforts you have made. Here again, the shaking of the status quo has brought us some unexpected blessings. We have been forced to find new ways to reach people: through Zoom, live-streaming, and other technology, as well as by resorting to lower-tech methods like phone calls and handwritten notes. We have also been forced to realize how important our common worship is, by being forced to be absent from it. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” they say, and this truth has been proven to us. Let us also cherish these lessons, employing newly learned methods appropriately and attending church at every opportunity, as if it might be our last. I was pleased by the eagerness and great desire to reopen and return to normal by our clergy and faithful, because the Church and the sacraments are indeed, to use a catch phrase of the past year, “essential” to the salvation of our faithful. This exemplifies the Christian attitude we must have going forward.

While many of us have grown closer to God through this refining fire of adversity, others have (unfortunately) drifted away. Now that the challenge of the pandemic is behind us, let us search out those who have lost their way and bring them back into the flock of Christ. Pastors: reach out to those of your parishioners you have not seen: pick up the phone or just send them a loving note of concern. Not just pastors, but all of you: check on

your friends and family who are downtrodden, lost, and confused; show them love and pray for them.

I am especially concerned about our youth. In fact, they have been so much on my mind, that I asked our Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America, of which I am the Vice-Chairman, to declare this year the Orthodox Year of Youth, which the other assembly hierarchs agreed to do. Even before the pandemic, worried clergy, parents, and other laypeople in our parishes often brought me questions like these:

WHAT ARE WE DOING FOR  
OUR YOUTH? HOW CAN WE  
KEEP THEM ACTIVE IN CHURCH  
SCHOOL, SOYO, OCF, AND  
YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY?  
WHAT NEW PROGRAMS CAN  
WE OFFER? WHAT CURRICULA  
CAN WE CREATE?

Now, the pandemic has only intensified the pressures and temptations drawing our youth away from the Church. Just as many of them were struggling with an unprecedented degree of isolation and loneliness, it became much more difficult to participate in parish life. The depth of their spiritual resources and commitment to Christ were tested, and some have fallen away as a result. You will hear some answers to these profound questions after my address.

This spiritual crisis for our youth has led me to reexamine our approach to Christian education and all aspects of youth and young-adult ministry. Although the questions we were asking before were well-intentioned, it may be the case that our whole paradigm needs to be refocused. What if we have been asking the wrong questions? What if new programs and curricula are not the panacea we imagine them to be? What if keeping young people engaged in old-fashioned organizations is not enough to keep them engaged in the Faith? What if there is a deeper need that we have taken for granted, or perhaps overlooked entirely? Our young people desperately need – not organizations, programs, and curricula – but to know the Crucified and Risen Lord, to include Him in their daily lives, and to participate in the life of His Holy Church.

Later in this meeting, Father Nicholas Belcher will present more details about the thoughtful work underway to renew our ministries to youth and

young adults, bringing these crucial needs into focus. I have assigned Father Nicholas to oversee all aspects of youth ministry (Christian Education, Camping, Teens, Young Adults, and so forth), and he is coordinating a committee of clergy and laypeople from across this Archdiocese for this purpose. I thank Father Nicholas and his team for their passionate concern for our youth and their work on this effort. I commend his presentation to you, and ask you to support this work through your prayers and cooperation. The spiritual formation of our youth is a duty we all share as clergy, parents, godparents, and extended parish families; it is not merely the job of a youth director or a few volunteers. It is accomplished through our loving engagement with youth and our modeling an active faith for them to emulate. It is accomplished not just at camps and retreats or in classrooms, but also in prayerful homes, in liturgically active church temples, and in parishes that serve the needy of this world in Christian love.

The most effective strategy for holding onto our youth is for us to live the Faith intensely and to be the Church of Jesus Christ faithfully. Youth can smell hypocrisy a mile away, and they are not interested in simply belonging to an ethnic or social club. They yearn for authenticity and significance. They want to be part of a movement as momentous and transformative as that begun by our Lord and His disciples two thousand years ago. If we are faithful in pursuing that call, they will eagerly jump onto that bandwagon.

This will also be the most effective strategy for weathering every storm of adversity, and for growing our parishes through outreach and evangelism. The world is looking for a spiritual home that transcends the anxiety and depression festering and spreading across the globe, that rises above petty political divisions and human pride, that manifests the otherworldly ideal of life in the Kingdom of God – that is, a life that exudes “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Let us all, therefore, recommit ourselves to living the Faith we have received, for the sake of ourselves, our youth, and our world.

The approaching new ecclesiastical year, on September 1, is an opportunity for us to make this renewal of Faith our ecclesiastical New Year’s resolution. Let us double and triple our efforts to put our parish life back in order, back to normal – or rather, better than our pre-pandemic normal. Bishops,

priests, deacons, trustees, department heads, parish councils, men’s and ladies’ organizations, young adults, and teens – we all have a role to play in this. Let us undertake it together, each doing his or her part to make our parishes active praying and caring communities that bring the light of the Gospel into the world.

I thank you all for working hard to see our Archdiocese through the difficult time now behind us. I thank my brother bishops for encouraging and guiding the parishes under their care. In particular, I would like to thank my beloved brother, His Grace Bishop BASIL, for his service to this Archdiocese over fifty years, as archdiocesan youth director, as a deacon, as a priest, and as a bishop. Some of you may know that, after writing to me, with my reluctant support, Bishop BASIL has written to His Beatitude, our Patriarch, requesting retirement from active ministry by the end of this calendar year. His Beatitude has placed the matter on the Holy Synod’s agenda for its meeting this October. We certainly owe much gratitude to Bishop BASIL for his ministry over so many years, and we wish him many more healthy years and blessings. Bishop BASIL will remain in the Wichita area, and we will continue to benefit from his wisdom and love.

Here I want to draw your attention to the countless hierarchs, clergy and lay leaders who have served this Archdiocese for the past 126 years. May their memory be eternal. We continue to ask for their prayers and supplications, as we continue to pray for the repose of their souls.

Additionally, I want to thank our Archdiocese Board of Trustees and officers, especially Vice-Chair Fawaz El Khoury, CFO Salim Abboud, Chancellor Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, and Vicar General Archpriest Thomas Zain, who multiplied their already great efforts on behalf of the Archdiocese during the pandemic. We had countless meetings about navigating the pandemic, and managing the affairs of the Archdiocese during this time, and this was no easy task.

Before turning to some administrative matters, I would like to say a few words about future bishops. This issue has been on many people’s minds, and rightfully so. Since my election in 2014, thereby leaving a vacancy in the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West, and other changes in the past few years, we need three or four new bishops. I discussed this issue in a recent meeting with our

father in Christ, His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, and hopefully we will work on beginning the process of fulfilling this need in the near future. It is indeed on our minds, and has been for some time. As you know, however, the Church sometimes works slowly and deliberately, rather than rushing such important matters.

Since this virtual convention is not conducive to voting, I have asked all the trustees whose terms are expiring to continue serving another two years. This means that all our trustees will be up for election or appointment at our next Archdiocese Convention, in 2023. After reading the constitution and the canons, and conferring with our Chancellor, we determined this to be acceptable given the limiting circumstances of the pandemic.

Many thanks to the people of Saint George in Pittsburgh, who did much work to prepare this year's convention, before concluding that it would not be possible to meet in person this year. As we move forward, the next two convention host parishes will be Saint George/Phoenix, in 2023, and Saint George/Cicero (Chicago), in 2025, God willing. The Department of Convention and Conference Planning is already seeking potential host parishes for the 2027 national convention. We are also very grateful to all those who made this virtual convention possible, something unprecedented in the history of our Archdiocese.

I also want to thank the office staff at the Archdiocese headquarters, who adapted creatively and diligently to the crisis. On short notice, they figured out how to work from home while continuing to provide all the administrative support needed for our parishes and archdiocesan efforts.

I want to thank the staff of the Antiochian Village and all our diocesan camps, who reacted quickly, carefully, and creatively, to the ever-changing restrictions of the pandemic. They made great efforts to switch gears from in-person to virtual camping last year, providing an amazing service to our children who were stuck at home last summer. This year, they monitored developments day-by-day in order to provide the most normal (while safe) summer-camping experience possible. Thank you to the Village Council, especially their chairman, Dimitri Zeidan, and the new camp director, Father

Christopher Shadid. Thank you also to the former director, Father Anthony Yazge for his work during the early months of the pandemic, and for his many years of service as Camp Director and overseer of our camping programs throughout the Archdiocese.

I would also like to thank Archpriest Joseph Purpura for his decades of service as Youth Director of the Archdiocese. His foundational and transformative work, together with his love and dedication for our youth, will be remembered for many years to come. Likewise, I would like to thank Mrs. Carol Buleza, who served so many years as Chairwoman of the Department of Christian Education. We are grateful for her many contributions in the development of materials for our church school children.

**The most effective strategy for holding onto our youth is for us to live the Faith intensely and to be the Church of Jesus Christ faithfully. Youth can smell hypocrisy a mile away, and they are not interested in simply belonging to an ethnic or social club.**

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank all our parish clergy, who are on the frontlines of ministry in this Archdiocese. You have been heroes, adapting to the ever-changing situation, in order to perpetuate the worship of God and to protect and nurture your spiritual flocks. Others may not have seen your sleepless nights, your secret tears, or your anxious deliberations, but God has seen them, and He will reward your love and faithfulness.

Having such a team around me in this Archdiocese gives me great confidence that we can now undertake the work of further renewal which I have outlined today. I pray that our God may strengthen us all to fulfill this good purpose. To that end, I leave you with this blessing, written by Saint Paul to the Church of the Thessalonians: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). Amen.

# STILL, WE GRIEVE

Linda Thomas

I played tennis with my brother Bobby last summer for the first time in twenty years. My first serve didn't make it over the net. My second serve didn't make it over either. And my return of serve was ... well ... let's just say it was about as good as my double fault. Even so, it felt good just to swing a racquet.

Standing on a tennis court and swinging the racquet was just the diversion I needed to make me feel alive in a time in which we've all been in a social coma for more than a year — as an invisible virus hijacked our lives and closed the world.

There are times I feel younger, the older I get, even as seasons seem to quickly pass before my eyes. I've seen too many dear friends and family leave this good earth, some even before ever experiencing the freedom and joys that come with aging.

Putting aside drama, and people who create it, life for me paused during these past sixteen months, and returned me to less complicated days. I discovered a kinder, more sensitive, and self-compassionate version of myself — more forgiving, more accepting. I've learned to like myself. Days, weeks, and months passed, and waves of emotions — fear, anger, sadness, the ache of loss, and grief — gradually lessened. I became hopeful. I channeled my energy to the present moment and found contentment.

I became more in touch with the way in which grief walked with me before COVID-19.

I spent most evenings binge-watching current hits, like *The Crown*, *The Queen's Gambit*, and *Bridgerton*; and sometimes finding comfort in repeats of *Father Knows Best*, the *Andy Griffith Show* or *The Big Valley*, those *golly gee* wholesome shows I watched as a child in the parlor of my grandfather's two-family home.

Back then, we lived eight blocks away in a vibrant neighborhood of hard-working people of

diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. People respected each other and gladly shared the few material things they possessed. Neighbors looked out for each other and for the kids in the street as if they were their own. There were mostly two-three decker homes nestled in our old neighborhood, and our doors were never locked.

Happier days came — pre-pandemic — planning and celebrating my mother's hundredth birthday on October 12, 2019. We gathered that day with family and friends to honor this woman. We congratulated her on living one hundred years, an amazing milestone, but not her greatest achievement. That was the love, caring and wisdom she shared every day of that long life.

She was known affectionately as Sandy, though her given name was Sadie. To Bobby and me, however, she was just Mommy.

Our family has been parishioners of St. George Orthodox Church in Norwood, Massachusetts, since it was originally built in 1921. My mother was two. Two years earlier, in 1919, the year of my mother's birth, the Ladies Society in Norwood was founded. I am a fourth-generation member of the ladies of St. George. My mother was the youngest member of the Ladies' Society when she joined in the early 1940s. At the time of her birthday, she was the oldest of their members — and the most senior member of our church in Norwood.

My mother grew up during the Great Depression and learned to give and be kind to others. Her father (my grandfather) was one of the few lucky ones still to be working. He explained to his family that he would buy extra groceries once a week, then have his two younger children (my mother, who was eight at the time, and her younger brother, who was five) deliver them every week to less fortunate families.

"Don't let them see you," he'd tell them. They'd drop the groceries at the door, knock, then run. They felt embarrassed, she said, and told their father once





was enough, but he insisted that they do it every week. I'm guessing they might have played a version of the knock-knock prank. Yet, as with any prank, it was only a matter of time before they were caught. As far as my mother remembers, they were caught in the fifth week, and that family never forgot the generosity shown to them.

My mother lived life with grace and humility, bringing joy, helping to make people's lives more complete with her impartial attitude and huge, forgiving heart. She worked tirelessly with determination, without complaint, or need for recognition. She never wavered or gave up. She had an infinite capacity to bounce back. No one would ever accuse her of slowing down. She was a voracious reader and knew all the regional and national news. She was a gigantic true and loyal fan of the Boston Red Sox, and knew every play and every player, including many of the numbers on the backs of their jerseys. She seldom missed a game, watching until the final pitch – even through extra innings that lasted well beyond midnight. She walked through the aisles and thumbed through the racks of many department stores. I couldn't keep up with her. I never had her energy. I'd often walk all over the store looking for her, but she was always a step or two – or three – ahead of me.

My mother embodied what it means to be resilient and strong, fiercely courageous, and a woman

of great faith.

Every two weeks, and at times weekly, for the last seven years of her life Bobby and I accompanied her to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston to treat her anemia. She received a dose of Aranesp to help boost her hematocrit and hemoglobin. When the blood counts were low, she simply put her fate in God's hands. When the counts reached a stable level for her, she didn't always attribute it to the treatment. She'd place her hand on her own mother's nearly 150-year-old cross that she wore around her neck every day, smiled, and say, "That's how."

In the last few weeks of her life, it was apparent Sandy was tired, though her youthful and positive attitude still radiated from her unlined face that only wrinkled to make way for a smile. Even as she savored the sweetness of the simple days of her youth, she remained a forward thinker, visionary, and an advocate for progress and change.

It had been three, maybe four, years since my mother was able to walk up the steps to the interior of the small Byzantine church where she worshipped her entire life. Most Sundays, however, while liturgies at sister churches were being streamed online, she was able to watch and hear the service in prayerful contemplation and thought.

Then, on the morning of Sunday, December 8, 2019, my birthday, Mommy lay peacefully, quietly, in bed, surrounded by family and friends. I lay on

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one side of her, Bobby on the other. I placed my iPad close to her ear, praying, knowing in my heart, she could hear the familiar solemn and tranquil voices chanting and singing. At the very moment the service ended, God took her from this earthly life.

It was symbolic she passed on the day I was born, as if her purpose in life and greatest accomplishment was to bring me – and my brother – into this world. Her children were her greatest joy.

Late that winter, while gazing out my kitchen window one morning, I spotted a bright red robin perched on a lightly glazed branch. The inquisitive visitor gently hopped onto the still snow-covered ground and seemed to peer back at me. I was curious to see a robin appear before the season changed, but then, again, I thought – maybe it was a sign.

We grieve – for Mommy, for ourselves, and for the world.

Flashing back to those dark days during lockdown, it seemed we were stuck inside an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, in which a man loses his grip when no human companionship can be found anywhere. Then, one imagines Rod Serling appearing from behind the curtain in his closing narration: “Up there, up there in the vastness of space, in the

of each other. Call your aunt. Call your friends. Stay in touch with our parish family. Help our neighbors. Pray. It’s in God’s hands.”

Still, she’d want us to preserve our health. Stay smart. Be safe. So, I cooked dinner every day (breakfast and lunch, too), using many of my mother’s (and grandmother’s) recipes. I baked bread for the first time, kneading the dough, to bring to life the memory of waking up Sunday mornings to the aroma of my grandmother’s bread-baking in her old reliable wood-burning stove, pervading the whole house. I bought an upright bike, which I’ve ridden in the family room every day since April 2020. I’ve been walking two, maybe three, miles most days, regardless of cold, wind or humidity. Just being outside has kept me focused, kept me sane. I cleaned the house every day, organized closets, and drawers, found papers, and mementos, and so many nostalgic black and white photos I hadn’t seen in years.

I haven’t been to Sunday Liturgy except for that one time on Sunday, December 13, 2020, for Mommy’s one-year memorial. Bobby and I sat in the back pew, windows open, fully masked, and scared to even breathe.

I felt conditioned to view being close to another human as just plain dangerous. I often found myself on my daily walk crossing to the other side if another walker or runner approached. Eventually, the day arrived: restrictions were lifted. No more state of emergency. Time to wake up. Time to recondition.

On June 11, family and friends gathered to celebrate my aunt’s ninety-first birthday. I saw family I hadn’t seen in a year and a half, maybe longer. We hugged. It felt good. But I hesitated and let go too soon. Maybe next time it’ll feel better. Safer.

I even played tennis the other day, mastered my top spin and won the first set. I wonder if I’ll ever adapt to these profound shifts that have fundamentally changed my life – like reaching for my mask; or Christmas and Thanksgiving, and every day, without Mommy; or robins in winter.

Still, we grieve.

A dear friend sent me a quote that seems to put our grief in perspective. “Grief never ends ... no time limit for that ... but it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. It is the price of love.”

**Grief never ends ... no time limit for that ... but it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. It is the price of love.”**

void that is sky, up there is an enemy known as isolation. It sits there in the stars waiting, waiting with the patience of eons, forever waiting ...”

I was conditioned, programmed, and nearly brainwashed. I put my trust and faith in science. I washed my hands. I didn’t touch my face. I physically distanced myself. No drinks at bars. No dinners at restaurants. No school. No house of worship. No hugs.

For me, on top of it all, there was no Mommy sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast, reading the newspaper cover to cover while watching *The Price Is Right*, cutting out coupons, planning dinner, then readying for our customary shopping spree – and offering me her words of wisdom.

I wonder. What would my mother think about these past sixteen months? What would she tell me? For sure, she’d say, “You and your brother take care



DEPARTMENT OF STEWARDSHIP

# ALMSGIVING

THE THIRD PILLAR OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY  
PART 2



THE SECTION OF THIS ARTICLE ADDRESSES SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT ALMSGIVING. IT IS WORTHWHILE TO BEGIN THIS DISCUSSION WITH A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF EARTHLY WEALTH. AS PAUL WROTE, “FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THIS WORLD, AND IT IS CERTAIN WE CAN CARRY NOTHING OUT” (1 TIMOTHY 6:7). AFTER LOSING HIS EARTHLY WEALTH, JOB SAID, “NAKED I CAME FROM MY MOTHER’S WOMB, AND NAKED SHALL I RETURN THERE” (JOB 1:21).

**A**t the moment of death, everyone’s net worth becomes zero. Depending on one’s situation in life, one may experience this as either a great tragedy or a great boon. For those who have worked hard over the course of many years in order to achieve significant wealth and social status, the sudden loss of nice homes, luxury cars, and personal recognition may be a painful experience. For those, however, who have lived for many years with grinding poverty, physical suffering, and social scorn, the moment

of death may feel like a blessed release. The Orthodox Funeral service plainly describes the great equalization that occurs at death by noting that, in the grave “kings and beggars dwell together.”

From the perspective of eternity, therefore, only during the relatively brief interval between birth and death does anyone have control over any money. Even this control is somewhat illusory. John Chrysostom once personified a parcel of land, and as such ruminated about the many people who had claimed to “own” it over the preceding centuries, and the many who would do so in the future. Ultimately, the land concluded, any such claim of “ownership” required a preposterous

suspension of historical awareness. This is also true of all the money in our bank and brokerage accounts. Ironically, the only asset any of us does continue to own after the otherwise complete dispossession imposed by death is the small plot of ground in which we are buried.

During our lives the only financial provision God promises any of us is enough money to buy adequate amounts of food and clothing. Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ . . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:31–32). Paul wrote, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:8). Any resources we have beyond these basic necessities

to the general fund of our local parish. People often describe any offering made to the Church as a tithe. This is incorrect. The English word *tithe* simply translates the Hebrew and Greek words for a tenth, or ten percent. The reason for giving the ten-percent offering to the parish are the clear historical precedents established by the Scriptures. The Old Testament prescribes that the ten-percent offering was to be given to the Temple. In the New Testament it was laid at the feet of the Apostles, which for us is equivalent to giving it to the local parish.

The Scriptures clearly teach that this ten-percent offering is holy (Leviticus 27:30,32), just like the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ are holy, and the image of God in every human being is holy. It is that portion of our “excess provision” that God provides us so that we can express gratitude to Him and grow into His likeness. We are, of course, completely free *not* to give the ten-percent offering, as we are free *not* to obey any of God’s commandments. God will not love us any less if we do not tithe, nor will He love us any more if we do, but not giving the ten-percent offering robs us of the blessing of obeying God’s commandments. Some of us react emotionally against the notion of obeying God’s commandments, based on mistaken notions of His character. Unfortunate experiences of harsh or dominating authority-figures in our past have distorted our judgment. This is not what God is like. As Jeremiah said, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). All of God’s commandments are given to us for our own good. Adultery destroys families and damages children. Stealing undermines the fabric of communities. Coveting leads to lack of personal contentment. On the other hand, loving enemies makes us emotionally and psychologically healthy. Forgiving those who sin against us enables us to experience God’s forgiveness towards us. And “mercy-giving” through the ten-percent offering and other acts of generosity enlarges the capacity of our hearts to experience God’s love.

The second step of “mercy-giving” is to give offerings to help needy poor people, educational institutions, missions, and charities. We should often pray that God will daily bring across the



are, in a sense, “excess provision.” This “excess provision” occurs for two reasons. First, it is simply an expression of God’s own prodigal generosity towards us, His beloved children. Secondly, it provides each of us the essential financial resources required to give alms in order to grow into His likeness.

The first step in the spiritual discipline of almsgiving is an offering of ten percent of our income



path of our life opportunities for mercy-giving. Because of the clear scriptural description of the tithe as a liturgical act, funds for these additional mercy-offerings should come out of finances above and beyond the ten-percent offering to the parish. This is the basis of the frequently encountered Church phrase asking us to give our “tithes and offerings.” First, we give our tithe to the parish, then we give our offerings to the needy.

It is often difficult in our culture to give secretly so that “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing.” It is perfectly OK if we want to receive public recognition for our gifts. It does not harm anyone else. It does, however, completely rob our almsgiving of its efficacy for growing in our ability to experience the love of God, both now and in eternity. As Jesus said, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.... [Instead, make it so] your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you” (Matthew 6:1,4).

In addition to the theological framework for thinking about almsgiving as a means to *theosis*, one can also view almsgiving using more transactional terminology. Financial investors often expend enormous effort weighing the potential risks and rewards of investment opportunities. Even after such scrutiny, some investments fail to achieve their hoped-for success. The profit of even their most lucrative investments evaporates at death. Giving alms, however, is a completely secure “investment vehicle” guaranteed by the full “good faith and credit” of God Himself. The infinite returns produced in this life by “mercy-giving” accompany us through the grave into eternity.

Randy Alcorn wrote, “When we die, we can’t take it (money) with us, but we can send it on ahead” by giving it away now. C. S. Lewis said, “The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God.” The Protestant martyr Jim Elliott lived, and gave his life, according to the truth that “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose.” Jesus put it this way, “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail...” (Luke 12:33).

Paradoxically, poorer people often have a substantial advantage over wealthier people in obtaining the blessings of almsgiving. Many worldly nonprofit organizations and our popular culture typically seriously distort God’s view of true generosity. They measure and honor the value of gifts according to their magnitude. God, however, measures the value of gifts according to the sacrifice involved in giving them. The Gospel story of the widow who put two small coins into the Temple treasury records that just prior to her donation, “many who were rich put in much” (Mark 12:41). Observing the enormous discrepancy between how much they gave and how much she gave, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had...” (Mark 12:43–44).

The \$2,000 tithe of a waitress earning a poverty-level yearly income of \$20,000 may involve far more personal sacrifice than the \$500,000 parish donation of a business owner earning \$1 million a year. She must significantly restrict her lifestyle in order to give this tithe. However, even after his \$500,000 gift, the millionaire will still be able to live quite comfortably. Therefore, the offering of the waitress may be far more valuable than that of the wealthy man for the sake of attaining both the temporal and eternal rewards of almsgiving. Indeed, even a single dollar given by the waitress may represent more personal sacrifice in the eyes of God than his entire donation. Many of this world’s most attractive financial investments are unavailable to those with little money. When it comes to the return on investment for “mercy-giving,” however, poor people have a substantial investment advantage over the wealthy. Occasional sacrifices of small purchases that enable tiny gifts of mercy will, in turn, buy things which “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man . . . which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

It is quite possible, however, for the large gifts of wealthy people to involve a lot of sacrifice. The two mites that the poor widow put into the Temple treasury hardly had enough purchasing power to buy a few morsels of bread. In a certain sense, therefore, her gift cost her almost

nothing. The \$500,000 donation of the wealthy man, however, may have cost him the opportunity to buy a new car, live in a much nicer neighborhood, or make a lucrative investment. Thus only God is capable of judging the magnitude of each person's sacrifice.

In order to assist our faithful in the discipline of almsgiving, our parishes have a crucial responsibility to prioritize the mission statement Jesus gave at the synagogue in Nazareth that I mentioned above. Few things more powerfully motivate our people to tithe and give alms than a parish modeling such behavior in its own finances. And few things present a larger stumbling block to this than a parish's failure to provide this example.

Here is a possible practical plan for implementing tithing in a parish where this is not already the norm. After a season of teaching about God's unfathomably great blessings on almsgiving, parishes could then encourage their faithful to "test" God to see whether He does indeed bless their ten-percent offerings (Malachi 3:10). People who already tithe to the general fund could continue to do so. Those who now give less than ten percent and feel comfortable giving to the general fund could simply increase their giving in order to reach this threshold. Those who are concerned that the parish is not spending its money wisely, or are suspicious that all of this is just a clever fundraising scheme, could continue to give whatever amount they already do to the general fund, but give the extra amount required to accomplish their ten-percent offering to the parish benevolence fund. This would provide them the assurance that their additional offerings were not being used inappropriately.

Parishes could use whatever increase occurs in their general fund income as a result of all the above to first stabilize their finances and establish an emergency fund. The next step would be to help the needy poor in their own parish or diocesan communities, especially the elderly and disabled, retired clergy, and even students who need financial assistance to attend college or trade schools. They could even help some of their poor people tithe by covering basic expenses such as rent and utilities. Helping financially struggling nearby parishes would be a worthy project. A major goal should be to invest in the future of the

Church by providing substantial financial support to seminaries, Orthodox schools, and monasteries. Spending money on beautifying our facilities and new construction should be secondary, and not primary, parish priorities.

The Orthodox Church has a bright future in this country. A solid foundation of sacramental and liturgical life has already been built on the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. Turning now to an embrace of God's sacred gift of almsgiving has the potential to open up even greater opportunities for personal and corporate spiritual growth.

Even after this discussion many church leaders may still feel uncomfortable about initiating "mercy-giving" discussions, even if it is the third pillar of our Orthodox spirituality. They care so deeply for their flocks that they hesitate to take this risk. None of us like talking to other people about money. It is much more satisfying to talk about love and forgiveness, and it is much easier to talk about prayer and fasting. Probably even Jesus wasn't thrilled about potentially offending people, such as the rich young ruler, by talking about money, but the Gospel explicitly states that He "loved him" enough to do it anyway (Mark 10:21). Perhaps it is time for us to do the same.

This brings us to our final section, which is on the subject of *stewardship*, and how it works in the context of almsgiving. In the prior sections we considered Jesus' teachings on money, almsgiving and salvation, and practical considerations about almsgiving. It all comes together to illustrate why almsgiving is as important as prayer and fasting in our spiritual journey.

To review, Jesus talked extensively about money, not as a value to Him (or as a way to defray the church budget or build the treasury), but its effect on our spiritual health. It is a grace that can be used or abused, to help or impede our spiritual journey towards Christ, from a "soul-centric" perspective. An example was given about the rich, young ruler, who asked how to inherit eternal life, and the surprising response that Jesus gave to "go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). Jesus saw that this man had put his faith in his earthly possessions before his faith in God. Valuing earthly treasure above God is idolatry, and as such becomes



a roadblock to the Kingdom. Tithing particularly is an effective way to learn to purify our souls from financial passions. When we learn to give up money, we can be purified of financial passions. It is clear that pastors should teach about the topic of almsgiving, including money and tithing, first and foremost in the context of spiritual health and growth, and not in the context of budgets and capital campaigns. Budgets are an expression of spiritual health. Jesus's teachings on money are the foundations of stewardship: the giving of time, talents, and money; and a prescription for spiritual health.

Let us consider more closely in this second section the enormous spiritual value of almsgiving, or mercy-giving. Almsgiving does not execute a transaction for real estate in heaven (we can't buy salvation), but it is a practice that expands our capacity to receive His mercy. Almsgiving helps us to grow in the likeness of Christ, in His generosity and mercy. There is another rich, young ruler in the Bible, different than the one we mentioned in the first section, but, unlike the first, he *did* give up everything to follow Christ. Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul became, through his experience, a great teacher about stewardship; and he also used the same "soul-centric" paradigm for almsgiving, in the context of spiritual health. It is not only because the poor need the money, nor that God needs it, but it is the growth of the soul of the giver that ensues (as the fruits) from almsgiving as a way to show mercy on those in need. Saul did not go away sorrowful, as did "the rich, young ruler"; rather, he repented, gave up everything he had, and picked up his cross to follow Christ. In doing so, he became St. Paul, and not only saved himself, but billions of Christians through time, up to and including even us, more than two thousand years later. We need all three pillars, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, to grow in the likeness of Christ. As St. Isaac the Syrian has said, the desire for almsgiving is an integral part of *theosis*, "when it (a desire for mercy for all mankind) is continually present, the image of the heavenly Father will be seen in you" (*Homilies*, Appendix A, Chapter V).

Now let us look at practical considerations in almsgiving. The basic theme of this third section is that we really are not the true owners of earthly possessions, for, as we hear in the Orthodox

Funeral service, "in the grave, kings and beggars dwell together." We only enjoy our possessions for a brief interlude between birth and death. This is also the description of a steward: we are temporal caretakers of any wealth or possessions entrusted to us by God. The first step in almsgiving, or mercy-giving, is to tithe (not just give any amount, but to give ten percent of our income) to our parish, that is the local parish, my (your) local parish, and not just any parish (more on that soon), and for the general (operating) fund.

The second step in mercy-giving is to give (above the ten percent to the general fund) to funds for the needy, educational institutions, missions and charities. For parishes where this is not already the prevailing practice, members could start off by giving a lower percentage of their income than the ten-percent prescription, and then work up to the ten-percent prescription over time – say 3 or 4 percent to start, and step it up a bit each year. Balance is important here: giving should be sacrificial, but not so much that it puts too great a strain on the household budget. It may take some time to get both spouses on the same page, and incremental steps can be more palatable. Members who already tithe should continue to do so (and enjoy the fruits of the full prescription).

Finally, what does all of this have to do with stewardship? Everything! Christian stewardship is the giving of time, talents, and treasure. If we believe in Jesus Christ, then we know everything we have comes from Him. Therefore, all Christians are stewards, managing everything we have for Christ and His Kingdom.

From an Orthodox perspective, stewardship has an even deeper meaning than just overseeing or managing on behalf of Christ. The whole Orthodox Christian worship (right worship) involves a transformative journey from darkness to light, from blindness to sight, from death to resurrection, and from glory to glory until we become like Christ (transfiguration, *theosis*). This is the exercise and practice (*praxis*) of our life in the Orthodox Church. There is a definite prospect of infinite spiritual growth in all of our worship services, the sacraments, and the whole Orthodox life-experience. Our first steps in this continual journey are a sacrifice, an exercise, that usually involves some form of decrease, stress, or effort

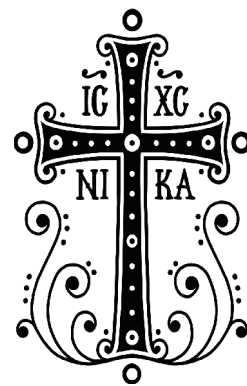
on our part. We see this in the Beatitudes, Orthodox baptism, Orthodox marriage, the Liturgy, the Iconostasis, the Prayer of St. Ephraim, the Ladder of St. John, and every aspect of the Orthodox Church. Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Christ not only rose, he rose from the *grave*. This is the paradoxical pattern of spiritual growth in the Orthodox Church: we decrease to increase, die to live, fast to feast, elevate the Cross (from crucifixion to salvation), pray to commune. This pattern of growth is prevalent in the physical world as well, of course, whether in competing, learning, farming, building, baking bread or giving birth: all involve some form of strenuous effort, or even pain, toward a goal or achievement. If we want to strengthen our muscles, we have to first stress them to the point that the muscle fibers split and grow larger and stronger than before. Our bone structure involves the same paradoxical pattern: if we don't stress them enough, they become frail and brittle. The same is true for our immune system, as the stress created by pathogens creates antigens that strengthen our defenses to disease. The same dynamic is true for the brain, the heart, and the cardiovascular system. All of these biological growth patterns require stress (along with the right nutrients) to stimulate growth. The same is true of spiritual growth: the decrease (along with the sacraments) stimulate spiritual growth in our ability to receive Christ. The patterns are similar, but the potential for physical growth is finite, while that for spiritual growth is infinite. This is the *how*, to the *why* that Orthodox Christian worship is *right* worship. It is the true and honest prescription for real spiritual health and growth. Orthodox stewardship is a form of sacrifice. We must decrease our interests and increase His, and in doing so increase our capacity to receive Christ.

In closing, the giving of our time, talents, and treasure should be focused on our one local parish, with love and loyalty. Our local parish is where we experience Orthodox incarnational theology, and the chief means by which we receive His grace. This is where we meet God and God meets us. It is our spiritual family. Just as we would not change immediate families, we should not want to change our spiritual families. We should be just as committed to our spiritual brethren as we are to our own kin.

Christ tells us as much in St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, "Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:4–5). To quote Fr. Patrick Reardon in his book, *Romans: An Orthodox Commentary*, "Among the spiritual blessings conferred on the Apostle Paul in his experience and conversion, it is arguable that none was more significant than a strong and indelible sense of the union of Christ with his Church." Christ takes this personally, and He is present to us in the priest and brethren of our local parish (by the authority of the Metropolitan and diocesan bishop). We must honor them as they are Christ's presence to us in this world, and be true to them as the same, in the giving of our time, talents, and treasure. Only when our commitment to our local parish is fulfilled, continually, should we venture beyond and give to other parishes and charities. We show love and loyalty to Christ and His Church by way of our local parish, and our local parish is our way to Him.

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## THE LITURGIKON



THE BOOK OF DIVINE SERVICES  
FOR THE PRIEST AND DEACON

FOURTH EDITION

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT THE PRIESTHOOD?

Steve Cox

HAS THE PRIESTHOOD BEEN DONE AWAY WITH, AS SOME CHURCHES TEACH? IS THERE A NEW TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD OR NOT? WHAT DOES THE BIBLE ITSELF TEACH?

The Bible does indeed indicate that the Apostles were given authority to govern the Church from the very beginning. Govern and organize it is exactly what they did. The Apostles acknowledged that the office of bishop is similar to the office of the Old Testament priesthood. We will see where the Bible teaches that the Apostles themselves ordained *bishops* and *elders* in the Church and authorized others to ordain bishops and elders to shepherd and govern the Church. We will see, too, that the bishops and elders are responsible to watch out for our souls, and that they must give an account to God. We will show where the Bible indicates that all Christians are priests in a general sense, but that there is also a specially ordained priesthood that performs duties that other Christians cannot. A quick look at Church history will show that most churches have been recently established, some for perhaps four or five hundred years, and some less than twenty years ago. The Orthodox Church has been consistent from the beginning and has maintained the true teachings of Christ and his Apostles. The Orthodox Church has preserved the priesthood in its purity and proclaims salvation to the world.<sup>1</sup>

## IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The Bible teaches that there is a connection between the Old and New Testaments, but it is more than a connection: it is a completion or fulfillment. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:17–18 that he did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He continues, saying that one “jot” or “tittle” will by no means pass from the Law till all is ful-

filled. The word *jot* refers to a Greek *iota* which is like an English letter “I”. Likewise, the word *tittle* means the least particle. In Luke 16:17, Jesus tells us that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. In Colossians 2:14–17, the Apostle Paul tells us that the handwriting of the Law’s requirements was nailed to the Cross, which were a shadow of things to come, that is the body of Christ. In Hebrews 8:4–7, we see that the Old Testament priests serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, and now Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, and if the first covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for a second. In verse 7 we see the word “faultless” which is from the Greek word *amemptos* - G273) which means “in which nothing is lacking.” When he says, “if the first covenant had been faultless,” he wasn’t saying that it had a fault or sin about it, but that it lacked something. That something was Christ and his New Covenant. In Hebrews 10:1 we learn that the law was not the very image but a shadow of the good things to come. Again, the good things were Christ and his Church. We see from these verses that instead of the Old Testament being done away with, it was fulfilled, and that it resembled the New Testament in much the same way that our shadow resembles our body. Our shadow is not us in every detail, but it does resemble us enough so that, if we see two people standing in the sun, we can tell which shadow belongs to each person. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy that the Holy Scriptures (that is, the Old Testament Scriptures) are able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. So we see that the Old Testament resembles the New Testament and leads us to it.



Before we get into what the priesthood is, it might be good first to find out if the Bible teaches that there is a New Testament priesthood. Some today teach that the priesthood has been done away with, and then they will tell you that all Christians are priests. So, which is it? What does the Bible teach?

This teaching hinges on a passage of Scripture, Hebrews 7:11–24. We are told in verse 12 that the priesthood has been changed. In verse 18 the word “annulling” is used. Was it changed, or annulled? It was actually both. The priesthood itself was changed, but the *Levitical nature* of the priesthood was annulled. Verse 11 lets us know that the Levitical priesthood was not perfect and that another order of priest should arise that was not called according to the order of Aaron (family inheritance). The Levitical priesthood was annulled because it was fulfilled in the Christian priesthood (which had taken its place).

In Hebrews 3:1 we see that Christ Jesus is our High Priest. The Apostle Peter tells us twice that all Christians are priests. In 1 Peter 2:5, 9, we see that we are a holy priesthood and that we are a royal priesthood. So the Apostle Peter settled it with some pretty plain language. There really is a New Testament priesthood and all Christians are priests.

In what way, however, are we all priests? Is every Christian the same? Is every Christian capable of being and doing exactly the same functions in the Church? Do we all have the same gift from God, or could it be that while we are all equally Christian, we each have different gifts from God, and that each of us working together in the Church using the gift that God gives us makes for the completeness of the Church?

Since the Old Testament was a shadow of the New Testament that came later and resembled it, we can see the similarities between the two. In Exodus 19:5–6 we see that God viewed those who obeyed his voice and kept his covenant as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. This was in a general sense, because they couldn’t perform those things that the consecrated office of the priesthood could (that is, offer sin sacrifices and other duties that only the anointed/ordained priests could.) These men were consecrated to minister as priests (Numbers 3:3). All were priests in a sense, but certain men were consecrated (H4390 and H 3027- full of power) to minister as priests (H3547- to officiate as a priest).

In the Old Testament priesthood, we see that different priests had different duties or responsibilities. In Numbers 3 we see that some had charge of the sanctuary and some had charge over the things of the tabernacle. In Luke 1:9, Zacharias was to burn incense in accordance with the custom of the priesthood. We see that in the Old Testament priesthood, all priests had different duties: they were all priests, but had different jobs or functions. We see the same in the New Testament. There is a general priesthood and an ordained priesthood. All Christians are priests, but have different duties or gifts. *Apostles* are listed as being first, but the Bible mentions other duties and responsibilities.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul tells Christians in detail that they have different duties or roles in the Church. He even uses the human body as a metaphor to show what he means. The head, the eye, the ear, the foot, and more, all work together in different capacities to make up the complete body. In the same way, the members of the Church in their particular functions work together to make up the complete body of Christ, which is the Church. In 1 Corinthians 12:18 he tells us that God has set every member in the body as it has pleased Him. In verse 25 we see that we should work together with no schism or division, and in verse 28 we see how God appointed the members in the Church. For he says, “God has appointed these in the Church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after those miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” Paul re-affirms this in Ephesians 4:4–16, presenting a list of those in the Church in which apostles are first. In verse 14 he tells us he does this so that we won’t be as children, carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

In Romans 12, the Apostle Paul says that it is not because of his own power, but by the mercies of God (verse 1) and through the grace given to him (verse 3), that everyone who is among them, should not think of himself too highly. We are to think soberly, as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith. In verse 4 he tells us we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function. In other words, we don’t all have the same gifts in the Church. In verses 6–8 he states that we each have different gifts, according to the grace that is given, and he lists some of them:



the gift of prophecy, the gift of ministry, the gift of teaching, the gift of exhortation, the gift of giving, the gift of leading, the gift of showing mercy.

God gives us all a measure of faith, and, depending on which gift God gives us, we are better suited for it, and better at carrying it out. St. Paul says in verse 4 that we don't all have the same function. In verse 16, we are told not to set our mind on high things, but to associate with the humble, and not to be wise in our own opinion (G1438 & G3844). "Not to be wise in our own opinion" means not to think we know it all, that we can do more than the gift or grace that God gives us provides. To associate (G4879) with the humble means to be humble and to condescend or go along with those who are humble (G5011), that is those who are cast down, or of low degree. To think soberly means to be of sound mind and to exercise self-control.

Though we are all priests, we have different duties and responsibilities in the Church. All Christians are priests in Jesus Christ who is our High Priest. We know that God has set apostles as being first in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). So what are apostles? And what is their relationship to bishops and elders? Are bishops the same as apostles? What does the Bible say?

In Acts 1:16–26 we see the apostles in the process of finding someone to replace Judas. Peter mentions that a Scripture had to be fulfilled (verse 16) and that it is written in the book of Psalms (verse 20):

Let his dwelling place be desolate and let no one live in it (Psalms 69:25), and let another take his office (G1984). The word *office* comes from the Greek word *episcopo*, which means the office of a bishop. This is also the Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:1, when talking about the position of a bishop. The verse about his office is in Psalms 109:8: let his days be few, and let another take his office. The word *office* is from the Hebrew word *pequddah* (H6486), which means office of oversight. This word in the Old Testament can mean "office of oversight" or "authority" in a worldly sense, but when talking about the people of God it means the office of priesthood. We see its use in Numbers 3:32, and 4:16, and also in 2 Kings 11:18 (officers), and 1 Chronicles 24:3–19 (schedule of service). The Hebrew word *pequddah* was translated into several different English words, including "oversight," "office," "offices," "officers," and "schedule of service." The Apostle Peter is referring to the Old Testament priesthood and the Christian office of bishop in a similar way, but he has more to say about it. In Acts 1:24–25 he prays, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen, to take part in this ministry and apostleship." In verse 26 he says that Matthias was numbered with the eleven Apostles. Here we have the Apostle Peter in verse 20 referring to an office of oversight or bishop as being similar to the Old Testament priesthood in the sense of leadership of God's people, and in verse 25 he uses the word

*apostleship* to describe the same thing. So Peter is equating the priesthood with the office of bishop, or oversight, and the apostleship. These, however, are not the only words the Bible uses in talking about leadership in the Church. In Titus 1:5–7, the Apostle Paul uses the words *elders* and *bishops* interchangeably. In Acts 20:17, Paul uses the word *elders* (G4245 *presbuteros*). This is where we get our word *presbyter*, and it means “part of the council.” In verse 28 Paul calls them *overseers* (G1985) which means “office of a bishop.” To sum up, we see that the Bible uses the words *apostles*, *bishops*, *elders*, *overseers*, and Old Testament office of *priest* interchangeably to mean the leadership of God’s people.

### WERE THERE ONLY TWELVE APOSTLES?

Some will say that there were Twelve Apostles, with the Apostle Paul as the only exception. What does the Bible say? Barnabas is called an “apostle” along with Paul (Acts 14:14). This means that Barnabas was also an apostle. Titus and his companions were called “messengers,” which is translated from the Greek word *apostolos* (G652), that is “apostle” (2 Corinthians 8:23). So Titus and his companions were also apostles. Paul says that Andronicus and Junia are of note “among the apostles” (Romans 16:7). Epaphroditus is called a messenger (“apostle” – G652) (Philippians 2:25). In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul and Timothy are ambassadors (“elder” – G4245) which means members of the council of elders. So Timothy was an apostle also. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote to the Church. In 2:6 they refer to themselves as the apostles of Christ. Silvanus and Timothy were not among the original Twelve, along with Paul; nonetheless, they were apostles, along with Paul.

I think everyone agrees that the original Apostles were the foremost leaders of the Church. They were handpicked by Christ himself and they had the task of bringing Christ to the world when they were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. So how can these other men be called apostles? It makes sense when we see in the Bible that an apostle is also a bishop, and a bishop in the sense of leadership is an apostle. In Acts 1, we see that the Apostle Peter does indeed use the terms *office of oversight* and *apostleship* in the same way. The Bible does not teach that all Christians are priests in the sense of leadership and authority. It teaches

the exact opposite.

### WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A BISHOP?

In 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 Paul gives some basic qualifications for a man to be considered for the office of bishop or elder. A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not covetous (1 Timothy 3:1–7). He must also be one who rules well his own house, not a novice, and he must have a good testimony among those who are outside. Paul says something similar in Titus 1:5–9, where he says one must be blameless, the husband of one wife, have faithful children, not be accused of insubordination, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, and not greedy for money. Instead, he should be hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled. He must hold fast the faithful word as he had been taught, so that he can teach others. Paul is instructing Timothy and Titus on what to look for in a man before ordaining him to the office.

### HOW ARE BISHOPS PUT IN OFFICE?

In Acts 14:23, we learn that Barnabas and Paul appointed elders in every church. The word *appointed* (G5500) means “hand-stretcher” – you have to stretch your hands out to lay them on someone. So they prayed, fasted, and laid their hands on them to give them authority as bishops. Paul appointed Titus to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Paul said Crete was lacking something which Titus was to correct by appointing elders. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Timothy received his gift through the laying on of the hands of the eldership (G4244 – order of elders). We know that Timothy was an apostle or bishop from 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6. As Timothy was going round ordaining bishops (1 Timothy 5:21–22), he was told not to lay hands on anyone hastily. By the laying on of Timothy’s hands, the office of bishop was conferred on these men. Timothy was not to take it lightly: he was not to ordain someone without first examining them to see if they were bishop material. Paul did not want Timothy to be a partaker of someone’s sins if he was not qualified. In Acts 20:28, we see that this is



considered an act of the Holy Spirit. Deacons also were put into office by the laying on of hands and praying (Acts 6:6).

The Bible shows that bishops were put into office by other bishops ordaining them. This was done by ensuring that they met certain qualifications and then by the laying on of hands, with prayer and fasting. There is no place in the Bible where congregations chose or picked or voted in their bishop or elder or leader. So we have bishops in the Church, and the apostles or bishops are the spiritual leaders of the Church (God's people).

What are the duties and responsibilities of the bishops? Is he a bishop in name only, or does he have any authority in the Church? If he does have any authority or responsibility in the Church, what is it? What does the Bible have to say about it?

In Acts 15 we see that a problem had developed in the Church. Some people were teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. This was a big enough problem that Paul, Barnabas, and others went to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for an answer. Paul and Barnabas were apostles and Paul was picked by Christ to be an apostle, but they didn't decide it themselves. They also didn't go to just the original Apostles for the decision. They went to the apostles *and* elders. This shows that the original Twelve didn't have a monopoly on the Church. They shared leadership with other men who were ordained elders or bishops (Titus 1:5–7; elders and bishops are the same). In verse 4 we read that they were received by the Church, and the apostles *and* elders. In verse 6 we see that not only the apostles, but the apostles *and* elders came together, to consider the matter. Again this shows that the original Apostles shared authority with the elders in the decision-making regarding the Church. In verses 7–19 we see that after much disputing, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul spoke, and then James spoke, giving his sentence or recommendation.

Barnabas spoke along with the original Apostles, which shows that his opinion was valued with the original Apostles. In verses 15:22–23 we read that choosing men to serve pleased the Apostles *and* elders, with the whole Church, and they sent Paul, Barnabas and others. The decrees that Paul and Barnabas were to deliver to the churches in the cities to which they went were determined by the Apostles *and* elders. Throughout this account, we see that the Apostles were held in the highest

esteem or respect. (They are listed before the elders). They shared authority with the elders, however, indicating that the elders or bishops have decision-making authority in the Church. This was the common understanding, as is indicated in Hebrews 13:7: "Remember those that rule over you and follow their faith."

## WHY SHOULD WE FOLLOW THEIR FAITH?

In verse 17 we are told they watch out for our souls, as those who must give account. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 that they "became followers of us and the Lord." He tells the Corinthians to "imitate me just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). In the Book of 3 John, "The Elder" speaks of a man named Diotrephes who was apparently over the local Church, and who would not receive John or anyone whom John sent. He resisted apostolic oversight to such an extent that John described his actions as malicious. The bishops are to keep the Church true and to rebuke those who are causing harm to the Church, and to lead us to Christ. Timothy is told that those who are sinning should be rebuked in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear (1 Timothy 5:20; cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). Titus is to rebuke sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (Titus 1:10–13). He is told to rebuke with all authority (Titus 2:15). Titus had authority to do so because he was a messenger or bishop (G652 – *apostolos*; 2 Corinthians 8:2) In Acts 20:17, Paul called the elders together, not the congregation. He called the elders or bishops because they were the ones in charge and would be the ones to pass information and instructions to the people. There are many examples in the Bible that show that bishops or elders are responsible to lead us to a closer union with Christ (1 Peter 5:1–4). They are not to be hard-hearted but are to lead us to Christ by following their example of Christian living.

## WHAT ELSE DO BISHOPS DO?

Jesus gave the disciples (soon to be Apostles) the authority to forgive or not to forgive sins (John 20:22–23). Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In Matthew 18:15–18 we see Jesus telling the disciples that, if someone trespasses or sins against you, and you have tried to resolve it but

can't, then you are to tell it to the Church. Jesus tells his disciples (soon to be Apostles) in verse 18 that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. The bishops understand their mission inside Christ's ministry and priesthood to be revealing the love and forgiveness of God. The bishops also interpret the Scriptures. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the Church (note: not individuals) is the pillar and ground of the truth. Paul tells Timothy, who is a bishop or ruler in the Church, to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We see in 2 Peter 1:20–21 that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. Consider, too, the eunuch in Acts 8:26–39: a man of great authority under the Queen of Ethiopia, he was in charge of all the Queen's treasury, so he was probably a very accomplished man. Yet he was not full of pride and thought that he could interpret Scripture on his own. The Spirit told Philip to join the chariot that the eunuch sat in while reading Scripture. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are

that if they forgave the sins of someone, then the forgiveness of those sins goes from them, through Paul in the presence of Christ. This is truly Apostolic succession. This shows that this gift did not stop with the Apostles, but continued on for the benefit of God's people. Romans 15:16 shows the similarity of the Old Testament priesthood to the New Testament one: Paul says that he is a minister of Jesus Christ and that he is ministering the gospel of God. The word "ministering" comes from the Greek word (*hierourgeo* – G2418) which means to officiate as a priest. Among the many words that the Apostle Paul could have used here, he chose a word that meant a temple worker in the sense of officiating as a priest. Paul carried out the work that God gave him to do, which was to guide the Church (God's people) in a priestly way. In 1 Corinthians 9:13 Paul again refers to himself in a priestly sense when he says, "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the Temple? And those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?" As a temple worker (priest), he could

## "Bishops have been ordained from the beginning of Christianity to now..."

reading?" He answered, "How can I, unless someone guide me." So the eunuch knew he couldn't interpret Scripture by himself; and the person who guided him was not someone outside of the Church but was an ordained Deacon of the Church (Acts 6:1–6). Finally, this was done under the direction of the Spirit of God. In a similar vein, Peter warns about untaught and unstable people twisting the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The Bible does not teach that just anyone can rightly interpret the Scriptures (Bible), but instead shows that Scripture is interpreted by the leadership of the Church.

Did the Apostles pass this authority on to the bishops? In 2 Corinthians 2:9–10 the Apostle Paul speaks of someone who sinned that, if they forgive, then Paul forgives. He adds that, if he forgave anything, he forgave it in the presence (G4383 – *prosopon*) of Christ. This is a very bold statement and Paul would not make it if it were not true. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth and all Achaia

have required them to support him, but he chose not to.

Bishops have been ordained from the beginning of Christianity to now, those from the previous generation ordaining our contemporaries, to carry the faith to the next generation. It was the original Twelve, plus Paul, in the beginning, and they ordained others to continue the work of God. They preserved the faith; they gathered together the various writings and decided which ones would make our Bible. They also preserved the teachings of the Apostles that were not written down. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Paul tells them to hold the traditions which they were taught, whether by word or his epistle. It didn't make any difference whether it was written to them or was spoken to them: it was all from God. Paul says something similar in 1 Corinthians 11:2: Keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. In 2 Timothy 2:2, he tells them that "the things you heard from me, commit to faithful men." He did not say, only "what I wrote to you," but

what they heard. In 1 Corinthians 15:13, Paul delivered *what he received*. The bishops and priests teach the traditions of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:34, Colossians 1:23, Hebrews 2:1).

### SO THERE IS A CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD?

All Christians are priests in a general sense. We have different duties or functions. The apostles (now bishops) are listed as being first in the Church. They take the leadership of the Church and lead others to Christ. They perform certain duties, such as making necessary decisions in Church matters; they offer forgiveness of sins; they offer communion (the body and blood of Christ). They, like Paul, officiate as a priest. They bring communion to God's people and lead people to a closer union with God. The men who have been appointed and ordained to this office do these things. The other members of the Church do different things, but the bishops and priests do the things that only they have been ordained to do. The average Christian who is a priest in a general sense cannot do these things. Only those ordained by God through his Church have the authority and responsibility to do so.

### WAS PETER HEAD BISHOP OR POPE?

The Bible indicates that the apostles and bishops ruled and made decisions together as a group. Since the Old Testament was a shadow of the New Testament, we can see where it was similar in this. When Moses was on earth, he was *the* leader of God's people. There were not many leaders, but one: Moses. In Matthew 23:2–3, Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Moses was in charge, but after he died there was not just one, but many who worked together. When Jesus was on earth he was completely in charge. When he ascended to heaven, he left not one, but many in charge. In Acts 8:14, the apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. How could Peter be sent, if he was the (head) Apostle? In Acts 15, the decision was made by the apostles and elders. If Peter were pope, all he would have had to say would be, "Look men, I've made my decision. Go into the world and teach it." He didn't, however. He accepted the decision of the apostles and elders, of which body he was a part. In 1 Peter 5:1, Peter refers to himself as a fellow elder (G4850). The Greek term means "co-elder." He

didn't say *head* elder; he used the word which meant a part of the eldership. Why should we refer to Peter differently than he himself did? In 2 Corinthians 12:11, Paul said that in nothing was he behind the most eminent apostles. That he said *eminent* shows that they had different responsibilities, but Paul was not inferior to them.

### IN SUMMARY

The Bible shows that there is indeed a general priesthood of all believers, and a specially ordained priesthood in the Church that carries out the priestly duties to shepherd God's people. We saw that the bishops or elders were ordained by the original Apostles and that their role was carried on by the new bishops to future generations. The election of bishops always maintained continuity with the apostles or bishops before them. We saw that the bishops have the authority and responsibility to lead people to a closer union with God, and that the Church through the bishops interprets the Scriptures. We showed that the Apostle Peter was not considered an absolute ruler.

This article is not meant to downplay Christian tradition. There are many ancient writings that show what the early Christians believed about the priesthood even before we had the Bible as we know it. The Church existed and thrived for many years without a list of Scriptures that we know as the New Testament Bible. It was the bishops who, with God's guidance, gave us the Bible. The Bible is in agreement with the way the Church was instituted by Christ. The words *bishop* and *elder* are in places used interchangeably in the Bible, but the office of bishop is a specific office in the Bible and in the early Church. That the early Church had a profound belief and understanding of the ordained priesthood is shown by many ancient writings that survive to this day. One can look to what has been left to us from Polycarp or Clement of Rome. Ignatius of Antioch, too, gives us quite a bit of information about the way in which the Church was organized.

One advantage of the Internet is that many ancient writings and manuscripts have been translated into English and are available on-line totally free. Also, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (on-line free) makes it easy to see the original meaning of Greek and Hebrew words found in the Bible.

1. Quotations are from the New King James Version. G and H numbers are from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.





## A SMALL AND MIGHTY DIOCESE OUR ROOTS RUN DEEP

Cindy Hayes

**W**ith parishes that have humble beginnings in the migration of the late 1800s and mission churches that were started nearly a hundred years later, the Diocese of Worcester and New England (DOWNE) is a small but mighty Diocese of 11 parishes (10 in Massachusetts and 1 in Rhode Island). The founders were the brave men and women who came here from Syria and Lebanon in the late 1800s to establish a better life for their families. Many began their parishes after founding Men's Societies and Ladies Auxiliary groups, worshiping in homes, and relying on temporary pastors to minister to the faithful.

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

Their commitment and dedication to God built these churches, beginning in the year 1900 (St. George, Boston) and the creation of 8 more churches in the area in the following twenty-five years. Since then, we have added 3 churches (1 Eastern and 2 Western Rite), and are looking to expand our footprint with more mission churches for the future.

*The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory.*

Exodus 15:2

As we are a smaller diocese, we are able to gather more easily to worship, have regular meetings, visit, and enjoy each other's festivals and bazaars. Each year we have had a Reception Celebrating Vocations, the seminarians and students who are studying in our local area to do the work of the church. We have a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy to share the Blessing of the Waters at Epiphany. We also have a Lenten Retreat and a Family Day, which are always so well-attended. Our Parish Life Conference brings all of our parishes together. At this culmination of the school year and celebration of our Church Schools, scholarships are awarded to teens going on to college. It is truly a blessing to be able to be together as a family, to share our ideas and faith. And although this year of the pandemic has been a challenge for all of our parishes, the work of the Antiochian Women of DOWNE has continued both locally and globally. We not only support our North American Board (NAB) Antiochian Women's Project, "Fulfilling the Vision: Building a Cathedral at the Antiochian Village," but our Diocese and parishes are all supporting children in the Middle East,

either through Children's Relief Fund, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), or directly to the orphanage at Saydnaya and Aid to Beirut.

Here on the home front, we are also blessed with the support that the Antiochian Women give to the Diocese and their parishes. This is so not only during Ladies Month in March, but throughout the year, as the women serve on their Parish Councils and Vestry, support Church Schools, teach, chant, sing, and support a myriad of programs in our local communities. They also serve on the Diocese Council, and in the Diocese Orthodox Christian Witness program.

*"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,  
and he will reward them for what they have done."*

Psalm 19:17

While many of our chapters have slowed down their activities or even suspended them during the pandemic, they have still remained active by maintaining support for Children's Relief Fund, IOCC, Project ZOE, and food pantries. They have made masks, scarves, and hats for people in local homeless shelters, and brought them toiletries as well. They have sold cookbooks and prepared food for Food Fairs to raise funds for their church and their local outreach programs. We have parishes that are supporting large-scale expansions of their churches with interior renovations, adding a narthex or creating new space in a new building.

*Blessed is the one who considers the poor!*

Psalm 41:1

We have been coping through the pandemic by holding virtual events. This year our annual Lenten Retreat was held as a hybrid event, being offered both live and over the Internet. Those attending

not only enjoyed the company of their friends and families, but were thankful for the beautiful retreat presentation and vesper service that followed in the newly renovated St. George Church, Norwood. Dr. Gregory Abdalah, Pastoral Assistant at St. George Orthodox Church in Phoenix, Arizona, and Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology at St. Vladimir's Seminary, was the keynote speaker. The topic for the retreat was "Don't Stop Believin': A Journey to the Kingdom of Heaven." In this wonderful presentation he reminded us that at every Divine Liturgy we are invited to be truly present, not only in the Liturgy, but in the life of the Church. This most important message speaks to our core beliefs as Orthodox Christians. Christ's gift to us is His Church; our purpose is to serve God and to build up the Body of Christ, to accept His gifts and to share His Word with the world around us!

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

Psalm 119:105

While many of us have begun to receive the vaccine, we will still rely on masks and livestream services. Our Parish Life Conference will be held as a hybrid event, with both live and virtual attendance this year, and will be offered from St. George Cathedral, Worcester. Let this be the time we are able to get back to our normal routines and be present in the life of the church.

It is a pleasure to share this glimpse into the Diocese of Worcester and New England, we are a diocese that is small and mighty. Our roots run deep, and God has blessed us abundantly.

In His Service, Cindy Hayes  
President, DOWNE





# NORTHWEST DEANERY GATHERS IN PORTLAND FOR RETREAT WITH BISHOP ANTHONY

JUNE 14–16, 2021

Fr. Matthew Howell

*“Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be, even as wheresoever Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic church.”*

– St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Church in Smyrna*

The clergy of the Pacific Northwest Deanery within the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West gathered together during the after-feast of our Lord’s Ascension from June 14–16. His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, called for the clergy of the deanery to meet in Portland for a retreat led by His Grace, Bishop ANTHONY of Toledo. Twenty priests and six deacons from the largest deanery within our Archdiocese gathered for three days at St. George Church, coming from Alaska, Utah, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.

His Grace gave four talks about the identity, role, and vocation of the priest within the Apostolic Ministry. In his first talk, he gave a broad survey of the development of Western cultural thought over the past millennium that have led to the pervasive modern secularism of today’s culture. Then he laid out how the Orthodox Church views this modern mindset and the errant thought processes that infect our culture, filling it with the pursuit of the carnal and the temporal/worldly. At one point he quoted the Romanian theologian Fr. Demetri Staniloae, who said, “Passions are infinite desires for finite things.” How does the Church respond? His Grace stated plainly: “We cannot follow culture; we must set a subculture that is strong and runs counter to the world.”

In session two, Bishop ANTHONY talked about the importance of hierarchy in the Church as found in the Holy Scriptures and liturgical services. Within this hierarchy, he emphasized the importance of priestly obedience to the bishop, because the bishop is within the apostolic succession. He said, “As long as your bishop is not heretical, then

you are obligated to stay within that order of the apostolic presence,” because it is the bishop who is called out from the world just as the Twelve Disciples were chosen by our Lord to be consecrated to the service of God. His Grace taught that through obedience to the bishop, priests preserve the order of the Church in service to Jesus Christ, and ultimately carry out the apostolic ministry to which they are called by the Lord Himself (cf. Romans 1:1–6). In response to a question about how we respond when we think our leaders are failing us, His Grace continued the theme of obedience, reminding the clergy, “You still have to stay within the obedient structure no matter what,” and that “obedience is righteousness” (cf. Romans 6:16). The subculture that runs counter to the world begins with proper order, hierarchy, and obedience within the Church.

His Grace also talked about how priests need to ascend to heaven in working out their own salvation through penitence, purification, and perfection, and in so doing they will take their people with them, rising above the sinful gravity of the passions. “Unless I’m heavenly minded, I’m no earthly good,” said His Grace, quoting an anonymous saying he grew up hearing.

Session three focused more on the apostolic ministry, specifically as found in the Sermon on the Mount, in Christ’s High Priestly Prayer found in John 14–17, and in the rest of the Gospels. “The Gospels are a manual for apostolic ministry,” he said. Connected to this, he also presented a teaching on the Mystical Marriage of Christ the Bridegroom to His Bride, the Church. This led to a very edifying discussion with the clergy about the sacramental role of the bishops and priests, and the way in which these sacramental functions relate to the *identity* of clergy, especially in contrast to the gender identity issues that are being wrestled with in our culture. Ultimately for clergy, when the bishop serves the Liturgy in the presence of the priests and deacons, it





underscores the identity of the clergy: priests and deacons are who they truly are when serving with the bishop, rising above temporality, entering into the eternal worship described in the Book of Revelation, and fulfilling the prophetic icon of the Mystical Supper in which Christ gathers His disciples around Himself to establish the Eucharist.

Lecture four was an opportunity for His Grace to tie up loose ends, give final thoughts, and answer any questions that had arisen from his previous three talks.

Throughout the presentations His Grace shared personal reflections on the priesthood and episcopate. Using his affinity for alliteration, love of language, and humble humor, he masterfully wove a tapestry of teachings that included the highest levels of traditional theology, scriptural exegesis, and pragmatic pastoral applications. He called the clergy to a higher plane of spiritual and pastoral life, while encouraging them to build on the good foundations they already have in place.

One of the blessings of retreats such as this is the opportunity for corporate prayer. In three days there were two services each of Vespers, Compline, and Liturgy. The retreat culminated in a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Wednesday morning, in which His Grace vested and presided while eighteen priests, six deacons, and many subdeacons and servers gathered around the bishop at the Lord's Holy Table, and several parishioners from St. George Church gathered in the nave to pray. The

description of the Church set forth by St. Ignatius of Antioch in the early Second Century was tangible and visible to all who were present: "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be." During the Liturgy Bishop ANTHONY preached about how the Holy Spirit will come to comfort, console, and counsel God's people on the day of Pentecost, and inspired the clergy to pursue the heavenly kingdom while relying on the comfort and counsel of the Holy Spirit.

In a summer in which the Parish Life Conference was virtual, this in-person retreat strengthened and refreshed the clergy. The clergy are grateful to Fr. George Saada and his family; Dn. Steven Bambakidis and his family; and the entire St. George Church community in Portland for their all-encompassing hospitality and kindness. They also are very thankful Reader Jonah Charles – who was tonsured by His Grace on Sunday June 13 – for beautifully chanting and reading at each service during the retreat. In addition, much appreciation goes to Fr. Michael Habib, the Dean of the Pacific Northwest Deanery, who expertly helped organize and manage the retreat. It was very good for everyone to be together even for a brief time. Those who attended called to mind the words of the Psalmist who said, "Behold now, what is so good or so pleasant as for brothers to dwell together in unity?" (Psalm 132:1).

# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDAINED

BASSETT, Protodeacon Michael, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on July 4, 2021, at St. George Church, Flint, Michigan. He is attached to the parish.

ELLAHAM, Deacon Nicolas, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ALEXANDER on June 13, 2021, at St. Mary's Church, Montreal, Quebec. He remains in Ottawa until his assignment.

GALAMBOS, David, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on April 25, 2021, at St. George Church, Boston, Massachusetts. Deacon David is attached to that Church.

MILLER, Deacon Thomas, to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL on June 13, 2021, at Holy Ascension Church, Norman, Oklahoma. He returns to St. Vladimir's Seminary for his final year of theological studies.

MORFAS, Deacon Kosmas, to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL on July 11, 2021, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. He is assigned as second priest at Holy Ascension Church in Norman, Oklahoma, until September 1, when he will be assigned as *proistamenos*.

NASSIEF, Sub-Deacon George (Raymond), to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on May 16, 2021, at St. George Church, Cicero, Illinois. He is attached to the parish.

NIQUILA, Deacon Anthony, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on May 17, 2021, at St. Mary Church, Palos Heights, Illinois. Fr. Anthony is assigned Assistant Pastor of St. George Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts.

OWEIS, Damian, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on April 11, 2021, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. He is assigned to the mission congregation of St. Basil the Great, Bismarck, North Dakota.

## ASSIGNMENTS

ANDOUN, Fr. Jacob, as Pastor of St. Stephen, Hiram, Georgia, effective August 1, 2021.

CHAGON, Fr. John, as Pastor of St. Ignatius,

Fitchburg, Wisconsin, effective August 1, 2021.

DAVIS, Fr. Jeremy, to Archdiocese Headquarters, effective September 1, 2021.

ELLAHAM, Fr. Nicholas, as Pastor of Holy Transfiguration, London, Ontario, effective October 1, 2021.

LASSETER, Fr. Herman, as Pastor of St. Peter, Madison, Mississippi, effective August 1, 2021.

FULLER, Fr. Paul, as Pastor of St. Nicholas, Springdale, Arizona, effective August 1, 2021.

HADDAD, Fr. Ghassan, as Pastor of St. George, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, effective September 1, 2021.

HADDAD, Fr. Ibrahim, attached to St. George, Richmond Hill, Ontario.

MOKBEL, Fr. Georges, as Pastor of St. George, Richmond Hill, Ontario, effective date to be determined.

MORFAS, Fr. Kosmos, as Pastor of St. George, Norman, Oklahoma, effective September 1, 2021.

NIQUILA, Fr. Anthony, to Assistant Pastor of St. George, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, effective September 1, 2021.

PAYNE, Deacon Anthony, attached to St. Mary Church, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

## RETIRED

ATCHISON, Fr. John, effective August 1, 2021.

FERGUSON, Fr. (*Protosyngolos*) Timothy as pastor-emeritus, St. George, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, effective September 1, 2021.

HENDERSON, Fr. John, effective August 1, 2021.

MEITZ, Fr. Martin, effective October 1, 2021.

## RELEASED

NIMRI, Priest Hisham, to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, effective June 18, 2021.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

A NEW LITURGICON is now available from the Antiochian Village Bookstore.

# HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY

Nick Papas

Books have helped, but when it came to understanding *The Hospitality of Abraham* icon, my favorite and clearest lesson was taught me by my eleven-month-old granddaughter, Zoe.

The icon of *The Hospitality of Abraham* is popular, found everywhere, often contemplated, and based only on a few verses from the Book of Genesis. It is such a significant icon that many believe it to be one of the most important images in Christendom. How did it gain such stature and fame? Many would rightly give most of the credit to Saint Andrew the Iconographer (Rublev), for having painted his perfect rendition of the Old Testament scene. (See two contemporary books for further background: Father Gabriel Bunge's *The Rublev Trinity*, and Father Steven Bigham's *Image of God the Father in Orthodox Theology and Iconography*.)

The message of *The Hospitality of Abraham* is straightforward and powerful. It could easily be missed, but once known, it is not easily forgotten. It is amazing that a single icon can offer as much as this one does. Iconographers, spearheaded by Saint Andrew Rublev and using the simple tools of color, line, and composition, have made this image “iconic” (in the popular sense).

All of this art, theology, contemplation, and writing originated with Abraham and his wife Sarah receiving surprise guests. Three of them!

Here is the story, from Genesis 18:1–8:

And the Lord appeared unto him[Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, **three men stood by him:** and when



he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore

are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

From this small gem of a story, we can fast-forward a few thousand years to the artistic manipulation of color and the exploitation of a basic circle and a basic triangle found in *The Hospitality of Abraham* icon. As we wonder what on earth it is that we are looking at in this icon, and why are we looking so intensely, we see three angels, simultaneously in a triangular composition and a circular composition!

If we ponder for a moment that central to the Christian faith is the reality that God is Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – then perhaps our wondering makes sense. The composition’s circle depicts “The One,” and the composition’s triangle depicts “The Three.” It is a brilliant use of basic shapes. A picture of the Trinity is painted using the childlike



tools of a circle and a triangle!

As an artist I had a smidgen of understanding of this icon because of the circle and the triangle, but to see the meaning of the Trinity in greater depth would take some additional steps. The concept is hard to grasp. Saint Patrick, who knew this, tried to teach the hard concept of the Trinity with the shamrock, a plant whose leaves are simultaneously three and one. The shamrock lesson, however, helped me only minimally.

Is the idea of Trinity one of those things that are so hard to grasp that we must give up? Are certain mysteries simply bigger than our minds can hold? I think that Patrick and the saints would disagree, because they were able to know and experience the Trinity. This personal knowledge of the Trinity, I believe, is what inspired St. Patrick to use the shamrock as a starting point for teaching and understanding. This knowledge must have inspired him to forge ahead when trying to explain this difficult idea.

*The Hospitality of Abraham* icon, along with Saint Patrick's shamrock, are steppingstones to the understanding the Trinity. We recall that this icon depicts the story of Abraham and Sarah receiving *three* surprise guests, and that their guests turned out to be *three* of God's angels, and that there were *three* angels. Patrick and all of the saints surely saw the significance of the three. Is the number three itself the mysterious key that unlocks this icon and an understanding of the Trinity?

Perhaps the mystery is solved when we understand that three shows us that God is community? Is this the deeper meaning of the Old Testament story? Is this what Patrick and the saints are trying to teach? Are we to learn the mystery that God is community?

God is community! This key, although it is a good one, is still more mere head-knowledge. I found further help in completing the sentence, "I love \_\_\_\_\_," with the blank filled with the word, "you." This little exercise helped a lot. Most of us have experienced love. When we experience "I love you," we have heart knowledge of love.

To love, and to be loved – this is what this icon is about. If we have ever felt, heard or expressed an "I-love-you," we know about love. And love is what and who God is! God is lover and loved. From God's love, which those who have felt love now to some degree understand, comes more love. The thing about love is that it is uncontainable, alive, growing and contagious. This uncontainable, alive thing called *love* is

why all of creation exists! God is love, and love cannot be contained. The source, origin and *why* of this creativity in and of love is seen in *The Hospitality of Abraham* icon.

This creative love is expressed in Genesis 1:26: "And God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.'" The words not only give an intimation of the Trinity in the word *we*, but boldly reveal the overflow of God's love by His having created man. Right off the bat, in the first words of the first book of the Bible, we are shown what the writer of these words understood to his bones, that God is and must be a community, and more specifically a community of uncontainable, creative love.

*Community, communion, love* – these are the words and concepts that have helped me, so I thought. I have loved and been loved. I have felt love. I imagined I was well on my way to comprehending the esoteric and lofty secrets of the Trinity. I understood that it is no coincidence that *community* and *communion* have the same root. They are words of sharing and fellowship.

Then I saw my eleven-month-old granddaughter eat. Sitting in her highchair with food on her tray, she was satisfied to finger and shovel her various morsels. She was happy to eat. She was content to get food. To be a spectator watching a toddler enjoy her food is as much entertainment as any human could ever want. Their joy and satisfaction are completely out in the open. It is pure and clear. It is difficult to imagine anything more complete than a baby getting her food ... until that same eleven-month-old eats, not alone, but with everyone else. She is engaged, watching, listening, and making eye-contact, and is oh, so satisfied. She is not just eating when she eats with the group, she is communing!

It is clear to me that all is right when food is present, but all is so much *more* right when community is present. I realize that all of the lessons I have learned point to this truth. It took Zoe, my granddaughter, to make it flesh. God has created us to want each other, to need each other, and to be fulfilled in each other.

It is such a primordial component of who we are, that it is there present and visible in the actions and expressions of a baby. God made us this way! It is right there from the beginnings of our lives. We have the handprint of the Trinity on us all. I have seen it in the sweet, satisfied look of Zoe's, sweet-potato-smear face.

Nick Papas  
Nick is an iconographer living in Houston, Texas.

# COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

## HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN IN TAYBEH

In 2018, my grandfather, Al Kinan, joined a pilgrimage led by Fr. Constantine Nasr to the Holy Land, a trip he longed to take for many years. With hope in our hearts, our family anxiously awaited the stories he would bring back from his travels. We clung to every photo and text-message sent to our phones of the churches, the relics, the sites, the food. The parables Christ shared with us were coming to life in real-time, through photos which showed where Jesus was born, baptized, walked, taught, and healed, was crucified, buried, and ascended. The entire trip, as one can imagine, was remarkable. While our family grew enthralled by the stories of the landmarks our grandfather visited, we were more greatly taken aback by his enthusiasm to tell us of a school filled with Orthodox Christian grade school students in Taybeh, Palestine. Little did we know, this visit to a school in Taybeh would kindle a passion to make others aware of these Orthodox learners halfway across the world, and to provide funds to help them learn. To quote our Lord, "Blessed is the one who hears the word of God and obeys" (Luke 11:28).

Fr. Constantine Nasr's life's mission is to support the school's continued success. Currently, the school serves 528 students from Taybeh and surrounding villages. Through the Nasr Orthodox Foundation and countless donors' love and generosity, the school

has acquired a new computer lab, expanded the library, installed twenty-five heating and air conditioning units, and constructed a teachers' lounge, and a Christian education classroom. In addition, there is a nearly completed gymnasium and student assembly area. The foundation has also supported many student scholarship opportunities. During the pilgrimage, the pilgrims were introduced to the Principal, Miss Abeer Khouryia, and met several teachers and staff members as they visited the classrooms in session. The students' humble parents provided a reception with homemade *zaatar*, sesame bread, delicious sweets, and *mazza*. After listening to faculty members' presentations and hearing their students' goals, my grandfather knew there was something he must do to support their efforts.

Upon Al's return to America, he quickly got to work making handmade wooden crosses in memory of his dearly beloved, late wife, Carol Kinan. He began fundraising for the school by selling these handmade crosses to the parishioners at St. Luke Orthodox Church, Garden Grove, California. Much to his surprise (but not ours!), our congregation enthusiastically supported his labor of love. Parishioners from our neighboring churches generously purchased these precious items as well. They then ordered more, keeping him busy every day and filling his home with the sweet aroma of sawdust. The outpour of love for these unique crosses and

the cause has raised over \$17,000 for the school to date.

More recently, my grandfather began donating one hundred percent of the materials and proceeds of his beloved handmade prayer corners, many of which hang within our community and other Orthodox Christian homes across the country. His sincere hope is that people throughout the Archdiocese will want to purchase these crosses and prayer corners for their personal prayer lives and the spread of Orthodoxy in the Holy Land. The school is in dire need of maintenance, updated computers, school supplies, books, and refreshments. The goal is to improve the facilities and expand to accommodate even more students.

Prayer corners are priced at \$185, including shipping in the continental United States (excluding Alaska). The price including shipment to Canada is \$215.00 (U.S.). Crosses can be purchased for \$25 each, plus shipping. (The shipping cost will differ, depending on how many crosses are ordered.) To place an order, call Al's son, Paul Kinan, at 714-577-6700, or e-mail [Paul@bhisi.com](mailto:Paul@bhisi.com). (Checks should be made payable to St. Luke Orthodox Church for disbursement to the school.)

*One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed.*

Proverbs 19:17

Madeleine Bitar



## MEMORIAL DAY AT ST. GEORGE, SPRING VALLEY

“And in thy Light we shall see light,” is inscribed on a gravestone at the 103-year-old St. George Orthodox Cemetery in Spring Valley, Illinois. On Memorial Day, May 31, 2021, we prayed for our departed loved ones and for every soul that has departed this earth. This year especially, these Trisagion prayers deepened our understandings and realization of the fragility of our lives. The weight of the pandemic and the millions of lives lost to Covid 19, combined with our enforced isolation from one another and grave concern for social injustices throughout the world, brought us to pause, reflect, and pray.

At the center of St. George Cemetery is a tall monument to Father Seraphim Nassar, 1878–1948. When Archimandrite Seraphim Nassar became the Pastor of St. George Orthodox Church in 1925, he had a vision to bring Orthodoxy to this little Midwestern town of Spring Valley, and to the people of the United States. To that end, Father Nassar embarked on a mission to translate the Divine Services of

the Church into English with the assistance of three sisters in the church: Mary, Elizabeth, and Sadie Abraham. Their efforts resulted in the publishing in 1938 of *Divine Prayers and Services*, otherwise known as “The Five Pounder,” which continues to be used throughout English speaking parishes in the world to this day. Father Nassar and many others who carried out this vision to provide accessibility to the Divine Services in English were laid to rest at the Cemetery.

All churches have important laity and clergy that make possible the dream of accessibility to the prayers and services of the Church. For we all worship as one body, one mind, and one heart, and we all are important members of Christ’s Church. The reposed souls of St. George Church helped build a foundation of Orthodoxy in the United States, just as the reposed souls of Orthodox Christians throughout the United States built churches and established communities. Full participation in the sacramental and liturgical services of the Church, and this sense of community, prayer, and love, sustain us through dark times just as

they sustained our ancestors. In Ephesians 4:32, St. Paul reminds us to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

We pray that all communities of faith will prosper through prayer and consideration for one another in love and forgiveness. Ever mindful of the uncertainties and difficult challenges of this past year, may we take up our cross, safeguard one another from harm, and keep Christ forever in our hearts and spirits. This Memorial Day and every day, we are reminded of the words of St. John Chrysostom in his Paschal Homily: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead





remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.”

Following the Memorial Service at the Cemetery, the St. George Community celebrated a wonderful family picnic on the church lawn. Parish Life continues after 103 years. We had lots of food, fun, and fellowship. The children enjoyed playing baseball, soccer, bowling, and a Star Wars fight with lightsabers. The picnic ended with rides in a Ford 1928 Model “A” automobile around the neighborhood, leaving everyone with lots of enjoyable memories for years to come as we continue the legacy of living Orthodoxy.

#### THE MOTHER OF GOD: THE “ABBESS OF MONASTICS” ST. SIMEON PARISHIONERS VISIT ST. BARBARA MONASTERY

An enthusiastic group of more than 30 adults and children left St. Simeon Orthodox Church with our priest, Fr. George Ajalat, on a sunny June day after Sunday liturgy for a drive into the hills of

Santa Paula, California. Our destination: St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery, about 70 miles northwest of Los Angeles.

We received a warm welcome from Mother Victoria and the other holy nuns of St. Barbara, who have lived in their small monastic community since 2005, sustaining themselves in part by growing lavender and producing lavender products. We were honored to be the first group to visit the monastery since the onset of the COVID pandemic, which has caused considerable hardship for the nuns, even in their seclusion.

“During the first half of the lockdown, it wasn’t possible for our priest to come,” M. Victoria told our group. “We were often doing reader services by ourselves.” Yet the nuns could still feel the oneness of the Church, she said, and they sensed that all the parishes around them were close to them spiritually.

*“The Best Tire Swing in Ventura County”*

The first part of our visit gave us plenty of opportunity to explore the lovely monastery grounds, which host a play structure for children, and a statue of a

plant-eating dinosaur whimsically named “Charlotte Brontosaurus.” A winding path leads down to a tree-shaded creek, and nearby is what the nuns claim is “the best tire swing in Ventura County.” Several of the children in our group, including Fr. George’s granddaughter Leila, agreed, after they enjoyed their turns on the swing, and so did Sub-deacon Mark Nassief after he gave it a try!

On a more somber note – tucked away in another corner of the monastery grounds lies a small cemetery for infants. Creating the cemetery, M. Victoria said, was the first task assigned to the nuns by their archbishop after they moved into the new monastery. A small shrine containing an icon of the Holy Protection of the Theotokos overlooks the small graves, each marked by a white cross and sprigs of lavender.

*The Mother of God in Our Lives*

After our tour of the grounds and bookshop, where many of us bought books, icons, and lavender products, we sat down with M. Victoria, M. Nina, and M. Paraskeva for a discussion of the Mother of God and her relation

in particular to women’s monastic life.

The Mother of God has been called the “abbess of monastics,” M. Victoria said. “Be open to her!” she advised us. “The prayers that the Church gives us to use all bring us closer to her. She sometimes



surprises us! Our job is to be ready to accept the grace that comes from her Son, through her, to us. Our job is to be ready to respond to her. All of us have the example of the Mother of God before us.”

M. Victoria said that her own spiritual life has been very much connected to the October 1 Feast of the Holy Protection of the Theotokos. When the nuns came to the Santa Paula property to settle in late September 2005, their first Divine Liturgy there was on October 1, celebrating that feast. M. Victoria showed our group a decades-old icon of the Blessed Virgin leading a group of the women saints of Russia and passed it around so that each of us could get a closer look. The icon originally hung in the refectory of the Monastery of the Veil in France, where M. Victoria began her monastic life.

*“She’s always there!”*

There are other feasts celebrating the Mother of God throughout the year, M. Victoria pointed out, noting that each is a wonderful occasion for us to approach her and become familiar with another aspect of her life. “She’s always there!” M. Victoria said.

Fr. George commented that for converts to the Orthodox faith, understanding our veneration of the Theotokos can be “one of the biggest struggles,” since in America there has been a strong bias from some Protestant sects against the Mother of God and they forbid praying to her.

M. Paraskeva, herself a convert from a Protestant evangelical background, said this bias can stem from fear of offering worship to another human that is due to God only. “There is good

motivation behind that – to avoid idolatry,” M. Paraskeva explained, “but the Orthodox Church differentiates between worship of the Holy Trinity and veneration of the saints.”

Describing a time when proponents of various heresies had attacked belief in the Theotokos, M. Victoria said, “It took an Ecumenical Council to verify that she is the Mother of God. It was a bloody battle to keep our faith.” To understand what we believe about the Mother of God, she advised listeners to read the prayer to Mary in the Morning Prayers, and the Akathist to the Mother of God.

“Through her, God accepts the sacrifice at the Liturgy,” Fr. George said. The Mother of God “is integrally involved with our Divine Liturgy; it is offered through her.”

After the discussion ended, we attended Holy Vespers with the holy nuns in the beautiful monastery chapel. Then we all enjoyed a picnic supper in the cooling air of the late afternoon before leaving for home. We are so grateful for the nuns’ hospitality and guidance, and we look forward to many more visits to St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery.

#### DEAN OF PACIFIC NORTHWEST VISITS ST. GEORGE, IN ST. GEORGE, UTAH

On July 9, 2021, Fr. Michael Habib, Dean of the Pacific Northwest Deanery, accompanied by Dn. James Hefner, drove for 7 hours from Twin Falls, Idaho, to visit the St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in St. George, Utah, the southernmost parish of the Pacific Northwest

Deanery.

A small group of Orthodox Christians began meeting for reader’s services in a private home in the fall of 2018 in St. George, Utah, under the direction of Fr. John Finley of the Missions and Evangelism Dept. of the Antiochian Archdiocese, with the assistance of Fr. Justin Havens of Ss. Peter and Paul in Salt Lake City. Within a year, a small building was purchased and donated to the mission for public meetings. In addition to Fr. John, several other priests or deacons have visited the chapel to conduct services on a monthly basis. The first Divine Liturgy was celebrated on March 14, 2020, by Father John.

This spring, Father John celebrated the first Holy Week and Pascha held in southern Utah. Many were blessed by and strengthened in their faith.

During Fr. Michael’s visit, he celebrated the Vespers service with Litia and Artoklasia Saturday evening to commemorate the Great Martyr Euphemia. He shared his 40-year journey of Orthodoxy from serving in the altar at the age of 2-and-a-half, as assistant to Metropolitan JOSEPH for 10 years as a sub-deacon, as pastor of St. Ignatius Church in Twin Falls, Idaho, and Dean of the Northwest Deanery that extends from Alaska to southern Utah. Fr. Michael also fielded questions afterwards from members of the parish. When asked what is the best way to promote growth in a small parish, he replied, “personal invitations to friends and family members,” and related an example from his parish in which Orthodox grandparents brought their 6-year-old grandson to church. Eventually



the youngster was instrumental in bringing the rest of his siblings and his parents into the church.

Fr. Michael encouraged those in attendance by saying that, though St. George is in a remote location and currently has a small membership, we are the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Earlier in the day he had visited a 3-acre parcel of land in Washington, Utah, that has been purchased for a future location for an Orthodox temple. He outlined the process of creating and submitting plans for building on the site, and said he would return for the groundbreaking when it is announced.

Sunday morning, Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Michael, Fr. John and Dn. James. Having a deacon serve liturgy along with visiting priests was another first at the St. George




parish.

All in all, it was a great blessing for our mission to be visited by our Dean, and we ask for prayers from everyone for the growth and maturing the Ortho-

dox faith and life here in Southern Utah.

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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 *"2021 New Year Appeal."* The purpose of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is to provide funds for the children in need in Lebanon and Palestine, and the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Deborah Brown

CRF Administrator

(917) 991-7192

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