

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA

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SUMMER 2025 E-BULLETIN



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ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

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FROM THE DESK OF SHERYL VANDERWAGEN

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Ah Summertime! A time for rest, relaxation, vacations, time with our kids, grandkids, and godchildren. I pray the summer has gotten off to a good start for you. As we enter summer, we experience a different kind of busy, we enter different daily routines. That is a good thing, but it can also be dangerous! Why do I say that? I have experienced many summers where a change in my daily routine caused me to neglect an important part of my spiritual life; I found the usual time for morning prayers were crowded out by the new routine; I found that with more of my family at home my usual quiet times were interrupted or cut short; I found that the longer daylight hours left me too tired to pray evening prayers. I think we've all been there.

This year, I have been reading through a collection of excerpts of writings of the church fathers. They are numbered by days rather than by month and day. Yet as I got to the 160's and 170's many of the selected writings from the fathers are encouraging the reader (me) to read Scripture and pray regularly. I think the editor of this collection knew how hard that can be during a busy summer. Here is some encouragement from the church fathers:

If you want to know how important it is to read Scripture, examine yourself. Think about what you become by hearing the Psalms, and what you become by listening to a song of Satan. Think how you feel when you stay in a church, and how you feel when you sit in a theater. Then you'll see that there is a great difference between this soul and that, although they are both the same soul. --St. John Chrysostom, Homily 2 on Matthew

For if, as I said, we constantly go back to meditation on the Holy Scriptures and raise our memory towards the recollection of spiritual things and the desire of perfection and the hope of future bliss, spiritual thoughts are sure to rise from this and cause the mind to dwell on those things on which we have been meditating. But if we are overcome by laziness or carelessness and spend our time in idle gossip or are tangled up in the cares of this world and unnecessary anxieties, the result will be that a kind of noxious weeds will spring up and give our hearts a harmful occupation. As our Lord and Savior says, wherever the treasure of our works or purpose may be, there also our heart is sure to continue. --St. John Cassian, Institutes

God bless each one of you. I pray you have a blessed summer!



ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN – THE NORTH AMERICAN BOARD

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AW SUMMER READING SUGGESTIONS

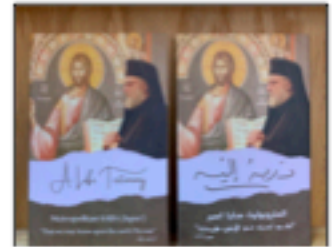
Suggested by

Book Title & Author

Sheryl VanderWagen
NAB President

A Life Testimony - Metropolitan SABA

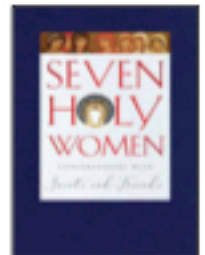
The Lord of Spirits: An Orthodox
Framework For The Unseen World & Spiritual
Warfare – by Andrew Stephen Damick



Claire Kaufman
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Seven Holy Women – Conversations With
Saints & Friends - by Melinda Johnson & friends

My Life in Christ - by St John Kronstadt



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Apostle to the Plains – Life of Fr. Nicola Yanney
by the St. Raphael Clergy Brotherhood

Putting Joy Into Practice: Seven Ways to Lift Your
Spirit from the Early Church by Phebe Farag Mikhail



Violet Robbat
NAB Finance

Royal Monastic: Princess Ileana of Romania
By Bev Cooke

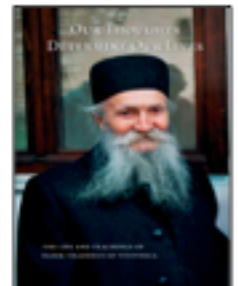
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Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives - The Life and
Teaching of Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

Patricia Aramouni
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The Way of a Pilgrim & The Pilgrim Continues
His Way - Translated by Olga Savin

Orthodoxy a Creed For Today
By Anthony Coniaris



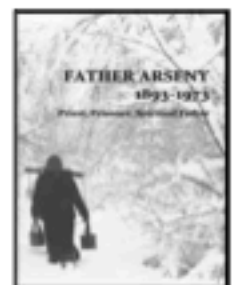
Laila Ferris
President DOWAMA

Mary As the Early Christians Knew Her
By Frederica Mathewes-Green

Angela Saliby
President AWE

Father Arseny - Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father
Translated by: Vera Bouteneff

Wounded by Love, The Life & Wisdom of
Saint Porphyrios – by Elder Porphyrios



St George Houston Ladies – On The Road

Submitted by: Faika Zaid and Abeer Srour

We are Faika Zaid and Abeer Srour and we are the coordinators of the Ladies Altar Society monthly bus trips. We would like to share with you something we do at St. George Orthodox Church - Houston, Texas. Our church is very fortunate to have a monthly bus trip for parishioners to enjoy. The bus is provided, complimentary from the City of Houston, for day trips for ages 50 and older. Check with your city to see if they might offer a similar program.



Each trip includes a detailed itinerary, restroom breaks, and lunch stops, ensuring

a smooth and enjoyable experience. It is a great opportunity to rally friends and fellowship or meet new people while exploring nice places to visit. These outings are very popular amongst our parishioners. It's a way to stay socially active and enjoy each other's company while visiting several interesting itineraries. Some of the places we have visited in the past include St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Monastery, different churches, boat rides, museums, shopping, railroad depots, wildlife attractions and much more. We start each of our journeys with a prayer and sing songs along the way.

We share snacks and jokes. Our smiles fill all the pictures we take, while we make memories together. So, you see, we look forward to eating lunch together while we get away and enjoy the day. Especially when someone else is doing the driving. If you're ever in Houston, please join us and enjoy the fun.





ABOUT DRAW NEAR DESIGNS

Draw Near Designs strives to create educational materials for Orthodox children to help them learn about and strengthen their Faith. You can find liturgical wall calendars, plush saint dolls, board books, subscription boxes, fleece countdown calendars, mugs, prints, and cards in our shop - all made by Orthodox families.

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Painless – Blameless – Peaceful – As We Pray

Submitted by Claudia Bogris - St. Anthony, Bergenfield, NJ

The New York City Marathon and the day my mother died will forever be linked in my mind. For those not from the metro New York area, the NYC Marathon attracts 50,000 runners, is the largest marathon in the world, and its course runs through all 5 boroughs. It starts on the Verrazano Bridge, which connects Staten Island to the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn (home of St. Mary's in Brooklyn) and is also the access point to Bay Ridge from New Jersey, where I live.

My siblings and I lost our father when we were quite young, so we knew we were very blessed to still have our mother, Rose Zrake. But the last 18 months had been quite difficult for her. A fall at home was the beginning of the end. It was a rollercoaster of "she's doing so well" to "no she's not" from day-to-day for over a year. But the bad days were starting to greatly outnumber the good.

"Each week at Liturgy we pray for a Christian ending to our life - painless, blameless and peaceful."

Our mom had 24-hour in-home care and a revolving door of her five children visiting, so there were always people she loved surrounding her. There were many conversations – fun family memories and more serious talks. We leaned heavily on our faith as a source of strength. But even the most faithful

among us – which my mother was – can have fear when facing death. I reminded her that we don't mourn like people who have no faith – we know the beauty that is ahead of us, and we talked about that a lot. And that each week at Liturgy we pray for a Christian ending to our life – painless, blameless and peaceful.

So where does the marathon fit in? On the day of the marathon, the access points to her home would be closed, so I would miss a day of visiting. But God guides us with intuition – in my heart I knew I could not miss that day. I left my house in the dark, crossed the Verrazano Bridge before it closed and parked over a mile away from her home. When I got to my mom's, I was surprised to see my brother Gregory, who had driven 5 hours overnight back from Alumni Weekend at the Antiochian Village Camp because he too felt God pulling him to be there.

So, we sat together with my mom, Greg holding her hand, as we listened to the Divine Liturgy online from St. Mary's – her spiritual home for 70+ years. We heard the beautiful choir sing. We listened to Fr. Michael Ellias' sermon. And then, before the benediction, after 95 years on this earth – a marathon! Rose took 5 fast breaths and then stopped. It was painless. It was blameless. It was peaceful. I am forever grateful that it was so. That I had her for as long as I did. And that I could hear God calling me to be there that day so I could be with her when she took her last breath.



Holy Pentecost – Old and New Testament Connection

Submitted by Violet Robbat
Religious Coordinator, Diocese of Worcester & New England

Last month, we celebrated one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church, Holy Pentecost! Celebrated ten days after the Feast of Ascension, Pentecost is where Christ's followers gathered in a room to celebrate the Old Testament Pentecost. The apostles had remained together in obedience to Christ's instructions to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But they weren't prepared for the strong and sudden wind that rushed through the building. With this wind came the tongues of fire that appeared over their heads. Through this descent of the Holy Spirit, they could now speak languages they had not known before. They preached with newfound bravery, eloquence, and wisdom, leading three thousand people to repentance and baptism that very day. Heaven's gates opened up to all people, to "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). The local language of each land had now become the sacred language of God.

"Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." (2 Corinthians 3:3)

OLD TESTAMENT: SHAVUOT (HEBREW WORD FOR: FESTIVAL OF WEEKS)

1. Celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover.
2. Celebrated God's giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.
3. Reception of the Law led to the death of three thousand. (Ex. 32:38)
4. Law was etched on tablets of stone.
5. First fruits of the harvest were offered up to God.

NEW TESTAMENT: PENTECOST (GREEK WORD FOR: FIFTIETH)

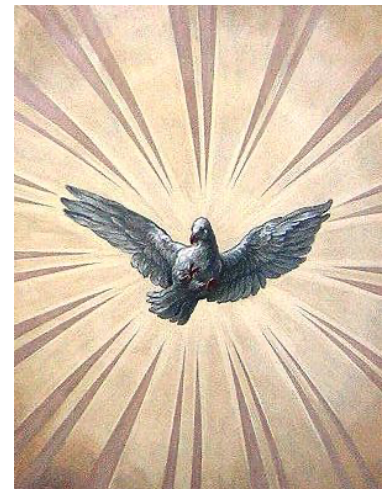
1. Celebrated on the fiftieth day after Pascha.
2. Celebrates God's giving of the Holy Spirit to His followers on Mt. Zion (Jerusalem).
3. Reception of the Spirit led to the rebirth (baptism) of three thousand. (Acts 2:41)
4. Law is now etched on "tablets of human hearts". (2 Corinthians 3:3)
5. First fruits of Christ's harvest, the apostles offer their lives to God.

As you compare the Old and New Testament meanings, one can see the definite contrast between the two. Don't you agree that the "New Testament: Pentecost" is more Spiritually uplifting? I pray you all had a Blessed Feast of Pentecost.

Excerpts taken from:

"Heaven Meets Earth Celebrating Pascha and the Twelve Feasts"

by John Kosmas Skinas.



MY JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY

by Faye Thomas – St. Elias Cathedral Ottawa, Ontario

I was baptized and raised in the Roman Catholic faith but began my journey to Orthodoxy 52 years ago when I married my husband—I'll get to that shortly, but first I want to give you some of my family background.

I began my education in a small country school run by nuns. The language in our family home was English, but the school was strictly French and there was no kindergarten, so I began Grade 1 learning to speak, read and write in a language I was not familiar with. This I suspect was a challenge, but I don't recall feeling stressed about it. What I do recall is the fear that was instilled in me about God and my faith. This was the first time I heard about so many things that would happen to me if I did not follow God's rules. I distinctly remember pictures of hell on the classroom walls and had the image of my soul as being a white piece of cardboard that would have harsh black marks on it from mortal sins and grey ones from venial sins. I do not remember ever hearing that God loved me or had compassion for me. The only recourse for sin was confession and penance which would wipe the slate clean again. Even though I found these things scary, I was not too concerned because at this time my family was following the rules of the Catholic faith—attending mass on Sundays, making our Easter duty, etc.

Things changed when we moved and I attended an English public school as there was no Catholic school in Wakefield, QC. There also wasn't a Catholic Church. My parents' business in Wakefield was a hotel and Saturday night was their big night and so no one was getting up early Sunday morning to drive us to Church. The Catholic priest in the closest village was very diligent in trying to convince my mother to send us to a Catholic school. After two years, she gave in, and we switched to a Catholic school. In grade 7, I had Sister Ursula as my teacher. She understood our situation, but I dreaded every Monday morning when she would ask the class who had missed mass on Sunday. Each student had to give their excuse—mine was always the same—no one to drive us to the nearest Catholic Church. I can still hear Sister Ursula's words that if “you missed Mass on Sunday and died on Monday—you would burn in hell forever”. I want to add here that my views on how the Catholic Church taught me about the FEAR of God and nothing that I can recall about the LOVE of God may not be completely accurate because children have the tendency to sometimes overlook things. If I have misrepresented my upbringing or Sister Ursula I do apologize, for that is not my intention--I do not want to knock down the Catholic Church for this is my family ancestry and part of who I am –I simply want to express how I felt about things at this stage of my life. I believe that these feelings played an important role in my journey to Orthodoxy.

We moved to Ottawa when I was in grade 10, and I attended a public high school. I met my future husband, Ray and had my first glimpse of Middle Eastern culture, tradition and religion at that time. It was all very different from what I was used to. Ray and I did not discuss religion much during our dating years as it did not play a role in our relationship.

My first visit to St. Elias was during the Easter season, Saturday night Midnight and Rush service and I found it very interesting but was not able to understand much about what was happening. I was 21 when we got engaged and this was really the first time we had a serious discussion about religion and where we would get married. Of course he wanted us to get married in the Orthodox



Church. I was hesitant about marrying in the Orthodox Church and as I told Ray—I didn't want to jump from the frying pan into the fire. I did not want to be made to convert before we got married and I did not want to have to agree to raise my children as Orthodox when I didn't know anything about the faith. The priest at the time was Father Kazaka—Memory Eternal. I was very impressed with him. He did not ask me much about my religious background,

only to say that he would require a copy of my baptismal certificate. He gave me a book called "Getting Ready for Marriage in the Orthodox Church" which explained the wedding service. He didn't even bring up the subject of converting. We were married in the Church in the summer of 1973 and in the fall of that year a letter came to our home saying that the Church School desperately needed teachers.

By this time, I had gained employment in Ottawa with the government. I loved my new job, but I missed my interaction with children. When I saw the letter, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity, but I WAS NOT ORTHODOX, and I wasn't ready to convert. I didn't give it a second thought until my sister-in-law suggested that I present myself as a candidate for teaching. I told her that Fr. Kazaka was not going to allow me to teach when I wasn't even Orthodox. She volunteered to call him and come with me to discuss it with him. It was arranged that we would go to Church early one Sunday morning to meet with him before liturgy. I was not familiar with matins, so I did not find it so strange that we were meeting upstairs in the boardroom on a Sunday morning. When we arrived, we saw Fr. Kazaka sitting around the table with about 10 of the older students TEACHING SUNDAY SCHOOL. He gave his students a task and we entered his office. He was surprised that I was interested in teaching and he only asked me one question—if I would

be willing to make the sign of the cross the Orthodox way while I was in the presence of the students. I immediately said “Of course” and that as long as there was a curriculum, as a trained teacher, I would be able to follow that and would abide by it 100%. He said that it would be an opportunity for me to learn about the Orthodox faith while I was teaching the students—and so began my journey. I taught for 3 years under his guidance until he retired in 1976. I now marvel at how seriously he took the Sunday School and the education of the future parishioners of our parish and what a “leap of faith” he was taking by allowing me to teach Sunday School.

By 1979 I had 3 children who had been baptized at St. Elias and had been teaching Sunday School for 6 years. I decided that it was TIME for me to become Orthodox. You might ask “What took you so long?” I wanted to feel comfortable; I wanted to feel at home, I wanted it to FEEL right, and I wanted to feel that I knew exactly what I was doing. All of these things were in place for me as I approached Orthodoxy. There never was any pressure from Ray or his family—as far as they were concerned, I had gotten married in the Church, baptized my children in the Church and even taught Sunday School—there was no reason for me to go through any formal conversion process. My only concern was my mother. My father had passed away when I was 17, but I knew what his reaction would have been—do whatever makes you happy. But, I did not want my mother to think that I was disowning my family, my background or my heritage—nothing was further from the truth—this was all part of my journey. I was relieved when I discovered that she was happy that I had found a place where I felt at home. She was present when I received Holy Chrismation. I now felt that I was Orthodox in every sense of the word—the only thing left to do was to continue learning and growing in my newfound faith.

So here I am 46 years after converting to Orthodoxy. What do I have to say for myself? I can tell you that I cannot imagine my life without the Church and my faith. She (the Church) has been a rock for me. I like to use the term “lifeline”. During my life I have had several lifelines, some were people, some were events, but the Church has steadfastly been there for me all these years guiding me through the stages and roles I have had as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, Godmother, grandmother, co-worker, joyous occasions and some sad ones. When my children were young, they used to say that I liked going to Church because it was “quiet” and I would get to “relax”. There is a lot of truth to that because Church was a place to “let go” of my daily concerns and just focus on God, count my blessings and be grateful for all God had given me.

The other thing I can tell you is that the more I “got involved” with the Church and her ministries, the more I realized how much I was lacking in knowledge and how I wanted to become closer to God. I taught Church School for 38 years which also led me to coaching the Bible Bowl and Oratorical participants. The Church School years were my foundation of Orthodoxy, and I will always hold a special place in my heart for the St. Elias Church School.

I joined the Antiochian Women about 30 years ago and found that these women were amazing!

I admired their love of their Church and how they would never say “No” to whatever was asked of them, if they were laboring for the Lord. When we began the beautification process of St. Elias, the first icon to be written was The Platytera and the Antiochian Women were raising the funds. A small group of women approached EVERY woman in our community and asked for a donation—no matter how large or how small—because this icon was from ALL of us. It could have easily been paid for by a handful of our ladies, but that is not what we wanted.



We wanted every woman to know that she had a role in obtaining this very first icon in our Church.

I hold the Antiochian Women of St. Elias parish near and dear to my heart. I have been giving Church Tours during the Lebanese Festival for many years now. This has also been an opportunity for growth. As I walk people through our Church I am reminded of how lucky I am to be a small part of all the magnificence of our glorious St. Elias Cathedral.

During my 52 years at St. Elias I have been guided, supported, nourished, encouraged and taught by our parish priests. Each one of them has contributed to my limited understanding of the Orthodox faith. I would not have had the courage to take on some of the tasks that I did had it not been for them. We really do not give our parish priests the credit they deserve. Where would we or our Churches be without them??

All of this is NOT to list what I have or have not accomplished over the years, but rather to reinforce what I said earlier that the more you strive to learn and get involved, the more you realize how little you really know. I am grateful for these 52 years and hope and pray that God will grant me more years of stewardship and service to His Church.



Antiochian Women 50th Anniversary Icon

Platytera Mounted Icon

This beautiful icon was painted especially for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America in celebration of our 50th Anniversary. These high-quality reproductions are mounted on 3/4" wood and finished with a keyhole on the back for easy hanging.

5" round icon \$34

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Antiochian Women Prayer Card (see 2 pics below)

2-sided 5"x5" heavy card stock, UV coated

features new icon of the Platytera on the front and the Antiochian Women prayer on the back Package of 25 -- \$20.00

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Christ our God,

we are all pledged to serve Thee with our whole being.

Help us to continue to work for Thee

through our Church without seeking praise, without seeking personal gain, without judging others, without a feeling that we have worked hard enough and now must allow ourselves rest.

Give us strength to do what is right and help us to go on striving and to remember that activities are not the main thing in life.

The most important thing is to have our hearts directed and attuned to Thee.

Amen





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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

Share “all the beautiful things!” We’re looking for poetry, short stories, or a reflection on one of our beloved Women Saints. Share something your daughter, goddaughter, granddaughter, niece, or friend may have written. Do you take photographs? Share a moment that particularly made you aware of God’s presence. Are you an Artist, and wouldn’t mind sharing your talents with the rest us? Do you make homemade items? Let AW know about them, so we can share.
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Send to: antiochianwomenla@gmail.com

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Next E-Bulletin:

Fall 2025

Deadline is **September 15th!**

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Antiochian Women's Prayer



*In the Name of the Father
and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit.*

*O Christ our God, we are
all pledged to serve Thee
with our whole being.
Help us to continue to
work for Thee through
our Church without
seeking praise, without
seeking personal gain,
without judging others,
without a feeling that we
have worked hard enough
and now must allow
ourselves rest. Give us
strength to do what is
right and help us to go
on striving and to
remember that activities
are not the main thing
in life. The most
important thing is to
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and attuned to Thee.
Amen.*

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Did you know? In 1976, it was Kh Joanne Allen who wrote the Antiochian Women's Prayer. 22

Many thanks for this beautiful prayer!

(Print out on stock paper and share with others)

