

Volume 51 No. 10

December 2007

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The Word

DAMASCUS

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

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Member
The Associated Church Press
Conciliar Press
Ecumenical News International
Orthodox Press Service

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:

U.S.A. and Canada, \$20.00
Foreign Countries, \$26.00
Single Copies, \$3.00

THE WORD (USPS626-260), published monthly except July and August, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238, periodicals postage paid at Englewood, New Jersey 07631-5238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to: THE WORD, 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
ISSN 0043-7964

www.antiochian.org

Canada Post Publications Agreement No 40691029
Return Canada address to:

AIM, 7289 Torbram Road, Mississauga, ON L4T 1G8, Canada.

editor's letter

GOLD STREAMING FROM DAMASCUS

It's December again, and we all know what that means. It's time to think about what we are going to do for Christmas. By "doing for Christmas," I don't mean going to Church, or even what to wear to Church or who to invite for the celebration of the feast. These questions and answers are easier. I mean what are we going to buy those that we love to show our love and devotion. This year, I'm resolved to start early and I am going to be thoughtful, not scramble with so many others on Christmas Eve to find something special among the left-overs. Starting early, surely I can find something really special, but I am having such a hard time. In past years, I've offered perfumes, clothes, books, purses and even jewelry. But this year I want something even more special. Perhaps some Damascus gold: exquisite, intricate, soft and pure.

The Church offers us such gifts in December. Among the many gifts of the Church in December are the images of such saints as St. John of Damascus, St. Nicholas, St. Barbara and St. Ignatius. These are heroes for people of our time. They are the gifts that will lead us to contentment, happiness and joy. They will lead us to understand God's sacrifice and love. Let's begin with John of Damascus, often called the "gold-streaming." Fr. John, a priest and monastic, taught the true Faith to Moslems, who were at his time the majority in Damascus. He spoke with conviction and love. His writings include a systematic explanation of Christianity, beginning with proof of God, and why God is three persons and one unity. He also refutes the claims against the icons, proving their place in worship and our lives. He extols Christians to read the Scriptures, even if they think they don't understand them, allowing God to speak to their hearts and feed their souls. He is an example of pastoring, love, integrity and courage.

St. Nicholas is also offered to us as a gift in December. This great pastor is known for caring for God's people, answering prayers

and needs both in his lifetime, and in every generation. The bishop Nicholas demonstrates love, conviction, and devotion by his ascetic and humble life. He is a hero, a man of distinction and integrity. Another saint, and another gift, is the child martyr Barbara, an example of exquisite purity. She embraced the Faith, and witnessed to the Truth with her life. Martyred by her own parents, she shows us the value of purity and the magnitude of God's gift, Jesus Christ. The martyred bishop Ignatius offered us the description of the Church and the role of our bishops in leading us to Jesus Christ. He showed us that the true Faith, delivered to us through him, is God's gift of love. This love took on flesh in Jesus Christ, and connected us to God, opening the way for eternal life. This great bishop of Antioch has led the world in understanding the Church, in every generation since his own time at the end of the first century.

In our parish in Pittsburgh, at Vespers on the feast of St. Nicholas, our Church school children ascend the bishop's throne to share what they believe St. Nicholas wants us to know about Jesus Christ. They reflect on the complexities of the world from the perspective and understanding of St. Nicholas and examples like Saints John of Damascus, Barbara and Nicholas. Together, they are the gold that the Church offers us at Christmas, so that we may understand and receive the love God brings us as He appears in the flesh.

In this edition of *The WORD*, you will find articles dealing with men in the Church, witnessing to the Faith, and the work of Christians in their respective communities. We offer these articles in the hope that you will see God through these examples and the witness of the "gold-streaming from Damascus," who offers us a revelation of Jesus Christ, a fitting gift for every Christian.

by Father John Abdalah





MEN AND CHURCH

In a time when churches of every description are faced with Vanishing Male Syndrome, men are showing up at Eastern Orthodox churches in numbers that, if not numerically impressive, are proportionately intriguing. This may be the only church which attracts and holds men in numbers equal to women. As Leon Podles wrote in his 1999 book, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*, “The Orthodox are the only Christians who write basso profundo church music, or need to.”

Rather than guess why this is, I e-mailed a hundred Orthodox men, most of whom joined the Church as adults. What do they think makes this church particularly attractive to men? Their responses, below, may spark some ideas or leaders in other churches who are looking for ways to keep guys in the pews.

CHALLENGING.

The term most commonly cited by these men was “challenging.” Orthodoxy is “active and not passive.” “It’s the only church where you are required to adapt to it, rather than it adapting to you.” “The longer you are in it, the more you realize it demands of you.”

The “sheer physicality of Orthodox worship” is part of the appeal. Regular days of fasting from meat and dairy, “standing for hours on end, performing prostrations, going without food and water [before communion] ... When you get to the end you feel that you’ve faced down a challenge.” “Orthodoxy appeals to a man’s desire for self-mastery through discipline.”

“In Orthodoxy, the theme of spiritual warfare is ubiquitous; saints, including female saints, are warriors. Warfare requires courage, fortitude, and heroism. We are called to be ‘strugglers’ against sin, to be ‘athletes’ as St. Paul says. And the prize is given to the victor. The fact that you must ‘struggle’ during worship by standing up throughout long services is itself a challenge men are willing to take up.”

A recent convert summed up, “Orthodoxy is serious. It is difficult. It is demanding. It is about mercy, but it’s also about overcoming oneself. I am challenged in a deep way, not to ‘feel good about myself’ but to become holy. It is rigorous, and in that rigor I find liberation. And you know, so does my wife.”

JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT.

Several mentioned that they really appreciated having clarity about the content of these challenges and what they were supposed to do. “Most guys feel a lot more comfortable when they know what’s expected of them.” “Orthodoxy presents a reasonable set of boundaries.” “It’s easier for guys to express themselves in worship if there are guidelines about how it’s supposed to work — especially when those guidelines are so simple and down-to-earth that you can just set out and start

doing something.”

“The prayers the Church provides for us — morning prayers, evening prayers, prayers before and after meals, and so on — give men a way to engage in spirituality without feeling put on the spot, or worrying about looking stupid because they don’t know what to say.”

They appreciate learning clear-cut physical actions that are expected to form character and understanding. “People begin learning immediately through ritual and symbolism, for example, by making the sign of the cross. This regimen of discipline makes one mindful of one’s relation to the Trinity, to the Church, and to everyone he meets.”

WITH A PURPOSE.

Men also appreciate that this challenge has a goal: union with God. One said that in a previous church, “I didn’t feel I was getting anywhere in my spiritual life (or that there was anywhere to get to — I was already there, right?) But something, who knew what, was missing. Isn’t there SOMETHING I should be doing, Lord?”

Orthodoxy preserves and transmits ancient Christian wisdom about how to progress toward this union, which is called “theosis.” Every sacrament or spiritual exercise is designed to bring the person, body and soul, further into continual awareness of the presence of Christ within, and also within every other human being. As a cloth becomes saturated with dye by osmosis, we are saturated with God by theosis. A favorite quotation comes from the second-century bishop, St. Irenaeus:

“God became man so that
man might become god.”

(By the way, it’s easy to find long-time church members who are unfamiliar with this, and may never have been taught it. The main instrument of teaching Orthodox faith has always been theologically-rich hymnography, and they may attend a church where worship is in a beautiful but archaic language they can’t understand.)

Challenges and spiritual disciplines increase self-knowledge and humility, and lead to strength

over sins that block union with God. A catechumen wrote that he was finding icons helpful in resisting unwanted thoughts. “If you just close your eyes to some visual temptation, there are plenty of stored images to cause problems. But if you surround yourself with icons, you have a choice of whether to look at something tempting or something holy.”

A priest writes, “Men need a challenge, a goal, perhaps an adventure — in primitive terms, a hunt. Western Christianity has lost the ascetic, that is, the athletic, aspect of Christian life. This was the purpose of monasticism, which arose in the East largely as a men’s movement. Women entered monastic life as well, and our ancient hymns still speak of women martyrs as showing ‘manly courage.’”

“Orthodoxy emphasizes DOING. Grace is not just a static concept, as in the old acronym, ‘God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.’ Grace is God’s activity in the world and within us, and we’re supposed to share in it and participate in it. The emphasis on action really appeals to a man’s desire for significance. Guys are ACTIVITY oriented.”

A NEW DIMENSION.

One man expressed his “excitement at discovering a dimension I had somehow sensed [in previous Christian experience] but had been unable until now to identify, the noetic.” The Greek biblical word “nous” (adjective “noetic”) gets translated “mind” in English bibles, but it doesn’t mean the cogitating intellect. The nous is the aspect of “mind” that comprehends and understands; it is designed to perceive the voice and presence of God.

“Noetic reality,” the reality of God’s presence and of the entire spiritual realm, “had become completely distorted in the Christianity I knew. Either it was submitted into the harsh rigidity of legalism, or confused with emotions and sentimentality, or diluted by religious concepts being used in a vacuous, platitudinous way. All three — uptight legalism, effusive sentimentality, and vapid empty talk — are repugnant to men.” The discovery of the ancient Christian concept of the nous means that he can now “encounter (really encounter, not just pick up as an emotional infection) the invisible realities that form the genuine substance of the Christian lexicon. It is not just

empty talk after all!” This unpredictable, life-changing, immediate encounter with God is “inherently dangerous, a new adventure, and a consummate challenge.”

Challenges well-met bring a man closer to something else that attracts him: freedom. “Even if we have yet to experience complete freedom from the passions, we know that freedom will be paradise. To have self-control over carnal appetites, to have clarity for noetic insights, to be liberated from the permanence of death — that is the freedom we crave.”

So the challenges have a practical goal. “Participation in the Holy Mysteries [sacraments], observing the fasts, daily prayers, and confession with a spiritual director means making progress along a defined path that is going somewhere real and better.”

JESUS CHRIST.

What draws men to Orthodoxy is not simply that it’s challenging or mysterious. What draws them is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the center of everything the Church does or says.

In contrast to some other churches, “Orthodoxy offers a robust Jesus” (and even a robust Virgin Mary, for that matter, hailed in one hymn as “our Captain, Queen of War”). Several used the term “martial” or referred to Orthodoxy as the “Marine Corps” of Christianity. (The warfare is against self-destructive sin and the unseen spiritual powers, not other people, of course.)

One contrasted this “robust” quality with “the feminized pictures of Jesus I grew up with ... I’ve never had a male friend who would not have expended serious effort to avoid meeting someone who looked like that.” Though drawn to Jesus Christ as a teen, “I felt ashamed of this attraction, as if it were something a red-blooded American boy shouldn’t take that seriously, almost akin to playing with dolls.”

A priest writes: “Christ in Orthodoxy is a militant, butt-kicking Jesus who takes Hell captive. Orthodox Jesus came to cast fire on the earth. (Males can relate to butt-kicking and fire-casting.) In Holy Baptism we pray for the newly-enlisted warriors of Christ, male and female, that they may “be kept ever warriors invincible.”

After several years in Orthodoxy, one man found a service of Christmas carols in a Protestant

church “shocking, even appalling.” Compared to the Orthodox hymns of Christ’s Nativity, “the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay” has almost nothing to do with the Eternal Logos entering irrevocably, inexorably, kenotically, silently, yet heroically, into the fabric of created reality.”

CONTINUITY.

Many intellectually-inclined men began by reading Church history and the early Christian writers, and found it increasingly compelling. Eventually they faced the question of which of the two most ancient churches, the Roman Catholic or the Orthodox, makes the most convincing claim of being the original Church of the Apostles.

A life-long Orthodox says that what men like is “stability: men find they can trust the Orthodox Church because of the consistent and continuous tradition of faith it has maintained over the centuries.” A convert says, “The Orthodox Church offers what others do not: continuity with the first followers of Christ.” This is continuity, not archeology; the early Church still exists, and you can join it.

“What drew me was Christ’s promises to the Church about the gates of hell not prevailing, and the Holy Spirit leading into all truth — and then seeing in Orthodoxy a unity of faith, worship, and doctrine with continuity throughout history.”

Another word for continuity is “tradition.” A catechumen writes that he had tried to learn everything necessary to interpret Scripture correctly, including ancient languages. “I expected to dig my way down to the foundation and confirm everything I’d been taught. Instead, the further down I went, the weaker everything seemed. I realized I had only acquired the ability to manipulate the Bible to say pretty much anything I wanted it to. The only alternative to cynicism was tradition. If the Bible was meant to say anything, it was meant to say it within a community, with a tradition to guide the reading. In Orthodoxy I found what I was looking for.”

Continuity is what stands behind those opening “challenges” and gives them authority, and makes the Orthodox life an organic unity. Spiritual disciplines chosen piecemeal, according to taste, will lack that resonant authority, but if the goal is still union with Christ, they remain of value. But if such disciplines are valued merely as bait to

attract men toward Christianity, they’re vain and empty (not to mention patronizing). One priest ridiculed the artificiality of “retreats where men beat drums, scream, and grunt for no apparent reason!”

WORSHIP WEIRDNESS.

Men who go from intellectual exploration to visiting an Orthodox church can be initially bewildered. “Orthodoxy is too startling to a Protestant who first encounters it.” “It’s amazingly different.” “The prostrations, the incense, the chanting, the icons — some of these things took getting used to, but they really filled a void in what I’d experienced until then.” “Some men initially can’t make heads or tails of what we do in worship, because it’s not purely intellectual, and employs poetic worship language.”

Perseverance pays: “Orthodoxy is startling at first, but the more I hung around, the more a sense of being home took hold.” “At first, we were bowled over by the high liturgy and its intense reverence, but there was something else going on, too. It’s that there is such a strong masculine feeling to Orthodox worship and spirituality.” Speaking as a girl, I initially disliked Orthodox



The nous is the aspect of “mind” that comprehends and understands; it is designed to perceive the voice and presence of God.

worship, because I was used to an approach that aimed at inspiration and uplift — in short, aimed at me. The relentless focus on God alone seemed “hard.” After a few months, though, I discovered that I had a deep-seated hunger for that objective God-focus, though I’d never suspected it before. A female visitor to a Vespers service that was only occasionally in English told me that she didn’t understand much that went on, “But I know one thing: this is so not about me.”

A life-long Orthodox priest writes, “Orthodoxy is full of testosterone! We sing, we yell ‘Christ is Risen!’, we shove even adults under water in baptism, we smear them with oil. Two or three things are always going on at once. Unlike what I saw in a Western church, it doesn’t take a huddle of people several minutes of fussing to light a censer. You light it and off we go, swinging it with gusto and confidence!”

NOT SENTIMENTAL.

In *The Church Impotent*, cited above (and recommended by several of these men), Leon Podles offers a theory about how Western Christian piety became feminized. In the 12th-13th century, a particularly tender, even erotic, strain of devotion arose, one which invited the individual believer to picture him or herself (rather than the Church as a whole) as the Bride of Christ. “Bridal Mysticism” was enthusiastically adopted by devout women, and left an enduring stamp on Western Christianity. It understandably had less appeal for guys, and perhaps the rigor and objectivity of the Scholastic movement which arose about the same time was an equal-and-opposite reaction. “Head” and “heart” were split; men retired for brandy and cigars in the Systematic Theology Room, while praying and church-going were given over to women. For centuries in the West, men who chose the ministry have been stereotyped as effeminate. A life-long Orthodox layman says that, from the outside, Western Christianity strikes him as “a love story written for women by women.”

The Eastern Church escaped Bridal Mysticism because the great split between East and West had already taken place. Christians in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa continued to practice an earlier, non-dualistic form of Christianity, with an emphasis on acquiring con-

tinual awareness of Christ’s inner presence through spiritual disciplines and humility.

The men who wrote me expressed hearty dislike for what they perceive as a soft Western Jesus. “American Christianity in the last two hundred years has been feminized. It presents Jesus as a friend, a lover, someone who ‘walks with me and talks with me.’ This is fine rapturous imagery for women who need a social life. Or it depicts Jesus whipped, dead on the cross. Neither is the type of Christ the typical male wants much to do with.”

During worship, “men don’t want to pray in the Western fashion with hands clasped, lips pressed together, and a facial expression of forced serenity.” “It’s guys holding hands with other guys and singing campfire songs.” “Lines about ‘reaching out for His embrace,’ ‘wanting to touch His Face,’ while being ‘overwhelmed by the power of His love’ — those are difficult songs for one man to sing to another Man.”

“A friend of mine told me that the first thing he does when he walks into a church is to look at the curtains. That tells him who is making the decisions in that church, and the type of Christian they want to attract.”

“Guys either want to be challenged to fight for a glorious and honorable cause, and get filthy dirty in the process, or to loaf in our recliners with plenty of beer, pizza, and football. But most churches want us to behave like orderly gentlemen, keeping our hands and mouths nice and clean.”

One man said that worship at his Pentecostal church had been “largely an emotional experience. Feelings. Tears. Repeated rededication of one’s life to Christ, in large emotional group settings. Singing emotional songs, swaying hands aloft. Even Scripture reading was supposed to produce an emotional experience. I am basically a do-er, I want to do things, and not talk about or emote my way through them!” He was helped by Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, which introduced the idea that there are such things as “spiritual disciplines, other than passive Bible reading.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Cheap Grace* was also eye-opening. “As a business person I knew that nothing in business comes without effort, energy, and investment. Why would the spiritual life be any different?”

Another, who visited Catholic churches, says, “They were conventional, easy, and modern, when

Most romance in our age is pink, but this is a romance of swords and gallantry." This convert appreciates that in Orthodoxy he is in communion with King Arthur, who lived, "if he lived," before the East-West schism, and carried an icon of the Virgin Mary.



my wife and I were looking for something traditional, hard, and counter-cultural, something ancient and martial." A catechumen says that at his non-denominational church, "Worship was shallow, haphazard, cobbled together from whatever was most current; sometimes we'd stand, sometimes we'd sit, without much rhyme or reason to it. I got to thinking about how a stronger grounding in tradition would help."

"It infuriated me on my last Ash Wednesday that the priest delivered a homily about how the real meaning of Lent is to learn to love ourselves more. It forced me to realize how completely sick I was of bourgeois, feel-good American Christianity."

A convert priest says that men are drawn to the

dangerous element of Orthodoxy, which involves "the self-denial of a warrior, the terrifying risk of loving one's enemies, the unknown frontiers to which a commitment to humility might call us. Lose any of those dangerous qualities and we become the 'JoAnn Fabric Store' of churches: nice colors and a very subdued clientele."

"Men get pretty cynical when they sense someone's attempting to manipulate their emotions, especially when it's in the name of religion. They appreciate the objectivity of Orthodox worship. It's not aimed at prompting religious feelings but at performing an objective duty. Whether you're in a good mood or bad, whether you're feeling pious or friendly or whatever, is beside the point."

Yet there is something in Orthodoxy that offers



“a deep masculine romance. Do you understand what I mean by that? Most romance in our age is pink, but this is a romance of swords and galantry.” This convert appreciates that in Orthodoxy he is in communion with King Arthur, who lived, “if he lived,” before the East-West schism, and carried an icon of the Virgin Mary.

From a deacon: “Evangelical churches call men to be passive and nice (think ‘Mr. Rogers’). Orthodox churches call men to be courageous and act (think ‘Braveheart’). Men love adventure, and our faith is a great story in which men find a role that gives meaning to their ordinary existence.”

MEN IN BALANCE.

A priest writes: “There are only two models for men: be ‘manly’ and strong, rude, crude, macho, and probably abusive; or be sensitive, kind, repressed and wimpy. But in Orthodoxy, masculine is held together with feminine; it’s real and down to earth, ‘neither male nor female,’ but Christ who ‘unites things in heaven and things on earth.’”

Another priest commends that, if one spouse is originally more insistent about the family converting to Orthodoxy than the other, “when both spouses are making confessions, over time they both become deepened and neither one is dominant in the spiritual relationship.”

MEN IN LEADERSHIP.

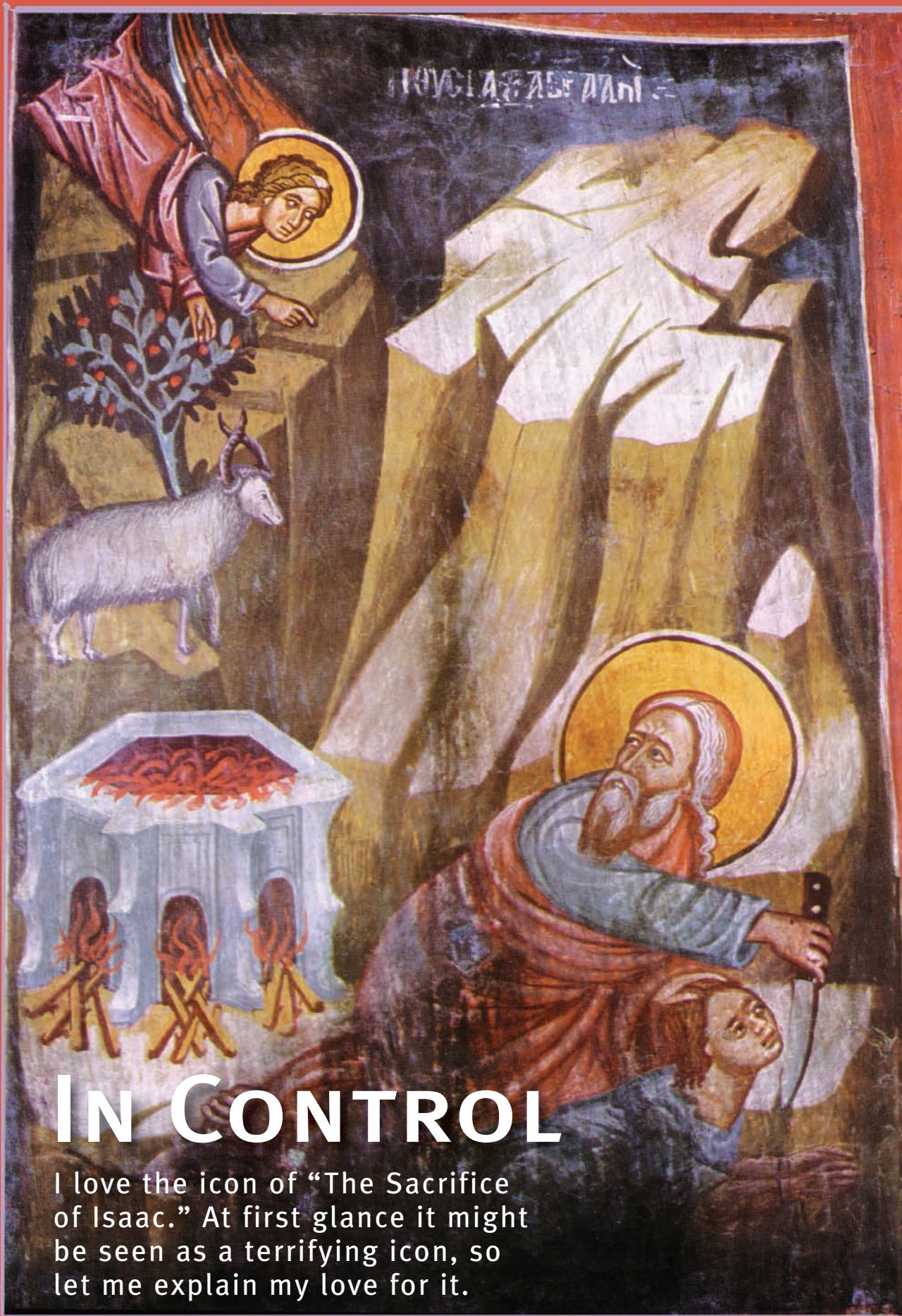
Like it or not, men simply prefer to be led by men. In Orthodoxy, lay women do everything lay men do, including preach, teach, and chair the parish council. But behind the iconostasis, around the altar, it’s all guys. One respondent summarized what men like in Orthodoxy this way: “Beards!”

“It’s the last place in the world men aren’t told they’re evil simply for being men.” Instead of negativity, they are constantly surrounded by positive role models in the saints, in icons and in the daily round of hymns and stories about saints’ lives. This is another concrete element that men appreciate — there are other real human beings to look to, rather than a blur of ethereal terms. “The glory of God is a man fully alive,” said St. Irenaeus. One writer adds that, “The best way to attract a man to the Orthodox Church is to show him an Orthodox man.”

But no secondary thing, no matter how good, can supplant first place. “A dangerous life is not the goal. Christ is the goal. A free spirit is not the goal. Christ is the goal. He is the towering figure of history around whom all men and women will eventually gather, to whom every knee will bow, and whom every tongue will confess.”

by Frederica Mathewes-Green

Kh. Frederica Mathewes-Green is a member of Holy Cross Church, Linthicum, MD.



IN CONTROL

I love the icon of "The Sacrifice of Isaac." At first glance it might be seen as a terrifying icon, so let me explain my love for it.

The message that God has power over death is the between-the-lines, secret message of "The Sacrifice of Isaac."

I have been attracted to the literary (and more recently, visual) image of "The Sacrifice of Isaac" for years. (*The story is found in Genesis 22.*) I first heard this story as a youngish kid. It is a shocking and unbelievable story for a kid (or adult for that matter) to hear. Since it is a distressing story, it leaves a lasting impression. It makes a person think things like, "How can this possibly be a holy story and how can Abraham be considered a Godly man?" The digestion of this story has been a long time coming for me. It has taken most of the time between my childhood and recent years. Now, as a father of three grown children, I have digested enough to perceive that this is a powerful, majestic story with lots of personal meaning and importance that could be more easily understood after struggling with real-life parenthood.

While I still cannot see myself taking a knife to any of my children's throats, I can appreciate that this crazy, alarming, attempted sacrifice had to do with trusting God. Trusting God completely and actually and without limits is the ultimate goal of a parent who wishes to have any inner peace. This is in conflict with the natural inclinations of parenting. Parenting seems predisposed to anxiety. The list of anxieties can be endless. The list includes, but is not limited to, what, when, where and how much will my kid eat, to what and how much will my kid wear, to who are my kid's friends, to what time and how much will my kid sleep, to what will his or her grades be in school, and on and on and on.

There seems to be no end to the things that require a caring parent's attention and concern. As such, there seems to be no freedom from worry and care. There seems to be no hope for finding inner peace. "My kids NEED me," we believe. "Who will take care of my kids if I don't?" we ponder. Frankly, there really isn't an answer and there is no hope ... UNLESS there is a resolving answer which comes from faith. This resolving answer and direction ARE given in "The Sacrifice of Isaac" story. And the answer that this story gives is tied to the core, natural anxieties about death, pain and suffering.

The root of anxiety is addressed in "The Sacrifice of Isaac." That is why this story is able to answer the tough questions. The root of our worries is that our kids will encounter pain, suffering or, God forbid, death. Abraham's story implies that he understood his own powerlessness regarding

pain and death while simultaneously having the faith to relinquish any remnant of his human control (and parenting) over to God. He willfully listened to God's crazy command to sacrifice Isaac. This was a fantastic trust in God's power and control (even to the point of death).

At the core of cores of this fantastic trust, and subsequently his ability to make the sacrifice of Isaac his son, was Abraham's faith. This is THE struggle for anyone who wishes to have faith ... Is God in control? Is God in control, even over death and pain and suffering? Is God in control even if I offer up my child, even, potentially, to pain and suffering and death?

While Abraham's extreme story is rare, if not one of a kind, it exists to inspire and encourage parents (and anyone in authority, i.e., Bishops, Priests, teachers, leaders, etc. ...) to at least struggle with and attempt to "let go and let God." As much as we are able to "let go" is as much as we will find peace and is as much as we will be able to grow in faith.

I will always remember when Simon Smolcic died. He was only 16 years old, a beloved and close brother to my children, dear to the heart of our family and everyone he knew. He was an angel on earth. We learned brutal lessons in the classroom of his death. It was not a classroom that anyone would willingly choose, but a painful classroom. Nonetheless, we DID learn and we learned undeniable things. We learned that his death has yielded fruit after fruit after fruit.

Perhaps the sweetest fruit has been to have a clearer vision that life is born from death. This is what we students discovered with the eyes of our hearts. Our tough classroom taught us this, here, on this side of the grave, here on earth. And it was such a clear discovery, here, on this side of the grave, that we all have become boldly confident in life's existence on the other side of the grave too. Gaining a notion that eternal life is for real, that is sweet fruit for sure.

The sacrifice of Simon was nothing anyone would choose. It was a tragic accident that makes the most sense when viewed as a sacrifice ordained by God. And when viewed as God-ordained we might see how in an inside-out kind of way God took our hands, placed them in His, and almost involuntarily, yet completely lovingly, led us to be by Abraham's side. At Abraham's side

we finally came to greater faith and could more willingly and peacefully offer up Simon to God. We could, with painfully learned faith, trust in God to take care of Simon.

The message that God has power over death is the between-the-lines, secret message of “The Sacrifice of Isaac.” It is the same message that is shadowed throughout many Old Testament stories. These stories are there to help us believe and to grow in belief and to have that belief bring peace and change into our lives. They also till the ground of our hearts and make them ready to receive the ultimate story (interestingly, a story which is hard to believe just like the Isaac story is hard to believe), which is the one about Jesus rising from the dead.

This is where being a Christian really becomes an incredible gift. When we lose our Simon or our grandparent or parent or brother or sister or friend, the “inside-out kind of way God took our hands, placed them in His, and almost involuntarily, yet completely lovingly, led us to be by Abraham’s side” is utterly fulfilled and answered and completely revealed when we see that God sent Jesus to be sacrificed like Isaac. Only, this time, the story ends more fantastically by having not just a reprieve from death but an ultimate and complete destruction of death!

Isaac was saved from death. Jesus destroyed death. Because of these messages and because of personal experiences that continue to echo these messages, it becomes clear that Simon’s death will also be destroyed and he too is saved. These messages from our life’s stories can be learned over and over and extrapolated again and again so that slowly, by God’s grace, we grow in our ability to believe.

Growing in the ability to believe and the subsequent loss of anxiety is what parents can get from “The Sacrifice of Isaac.” This is why the icon and story of “The Sacrifice of Isaac” are good for parents to ponder. They can help us to remember to relinquish control. They can help us to remember the source of our anxiety (death) and the hope for release from that anxiety (God). Bible stories (like “The Sacrifice”) and the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our own stories (like that of Simon) correlate. They begin to paint an amazing picture which depicts a merciful God who is in control, even over death. So, we can “read between the

lines” of our own stories and begin to find more and more faith; and by finding more and more faith we will find more and more peace.

The icon and story of “The Sacrifice of Isaac” is shocking. As parents, maybe our inertia of perpetual worry can only be overcome by shock. Maybe this shock is a loving nudge from God our Father. Maybe we will be shocked into letting go, which is a hard thing to do. God surely knows this. But even in the difficult task of letting go, God the Father does not merely use “shock treatment.” He uses an even better teaching method. He teaches by example. He models the way of true parenting by being a Father who lets us, His children, go. He lets us choose for ourselves. We are free. We are free to choose whether to be parents who will give our kids the freedom to choose. We are free to choose whether to be parents who will believe. We are free to choose whether to be parents who will be like little Abrahams and offer our children up to God.

A priest that I know delights in pointing out the similarity in the words “terrible” and “terrific.” I am guessing that this priest would describe “The Sacrifice of Isaac” icon and story as “terrible” and “terrific” because these words describe the elusive qualities of God the Father which are typified in this story. These paradoxical qualities are shadowy in the Old Testament but bright in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “The Sacrifice” in its shadowy way and the Gospel in its brightly revealed way pronounce a “terrible” and “terrific” message ... God loves us worrying parents and He gives us an option. He allows us to “opt out” of worry and “opt in” to freedom from anxiety. He was in control of death with Abraham. He was in control of death with Simon and He was most perfectly in control of death in the joyous resurrection of Jesus.

I am reminded that God is in Control. And that’s why I love this icon.

by Nick Papas

Iconographer Nick Papas is a member of St. Michael Church, Greensburg, PA.



Trusting God completely and actually and without limits is the ultimate goal of a parent who wishes to have any inner peace. This is in conflict with the natural inclinations of parenting.

THE PRAYER DISCIPLINE OF ST. PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

Prayer. It's one of the three pillars of our struggle as Orthodox Christians: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It's how we work out our salvation. And yet, for many, prayer presents the greatest challenge of the three.

First of all, what do we mean by Prayer? I'm always amused when outsiders say of the Orthodox: "Oh! You pray out of a book?" Yes, it's true, unless one has memorized the prayers, we do! I'm tempted to respond: "What? Your preacher preaches out of book?"

The chief end of prayer is to Glorify God. Now, for some, that may be a no-brainer; but, believe me, for many it's a new concept. Let me state it clearly: Prayer is not simply talking to God (though it is that). Prayer is not simply worrying in the name of Jesus. Remember? He told us not to worry (Matthew 6:25-34). I repeat: **WORRYING IN JESUS' NAME IS NOT PRAYING.**

Our prayer should give glory to God. When the disciples came to Jesus and asked "Master, how should we pray?" Jesus did not respond: "Just talk to me." I mean, they were talking to Him! Rather, as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke: "He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' And he said to them, 'When you pray, say: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name ...'" Our Lord gave the Disciples **A STRUCTURE** for their prayers, the model of which is what we often refer to as "The Lord's Prayer" or "The Our Father" (Luke 11:1-4).

The subject of prayer — and the struggle to pray — is a common one, often discussed between the Faithful and their Priest. Sometimes, in confession or counseling, I'll ask about someone's prayer life. If they say, "Oh, I pray all the time," I might ask, "What's your favorite prayer?" Here is where confusion might set in: "What do you mean?" As we discuss it, it becomes clear that by prayer they meant: "I talk to God a lot, telling him of my needs, concerns, and wants."

Brothers and sisters, this is not, should not be, the sum of our prayer life! **GOD IS NOT LIKE THE MAYTAG MAN IN THE OLD TV ADS, SITTING AROUND WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO GO WRONG SO THAT HE CAN BE ASKED TO FIX IT!** Nor is God akin to Santa Claus, where, unless we ask for it, he's not about to give it to us! It is **NOT** primarily our duty to fashion our prayer to move God to act. Rather, prayer serves to fashion us to act out of love for God.

In our prayers, as Orthodox Christians, we should pray as the Church prays. That is, we pray the prayers of the Church. The prayers found in our prayer books are prayers that have been prayed for hundreds of years by the faithful in all places. There is nothing new to our current situation that is not to be found in these prayers; God is still God and we are still in need of Him and His salvation. This is why we pray, simply put: to remind us of Who God is, who we are, and, in this ancient and worthy sacrifice, God meets us. Prayer is a dialogue with God and His Church, the Body of Christ. As members of His Body, we pray the prayers of the Church.

We stand, in need of salvation and in awe of God's mercy, with all of those faithful pray-ers (those who've prayed the prayers of the Church) before us. It's a family thing, between the children of God and the Father, by adoption in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Speaking of Whom, as with the services of the Church, all of our prayers begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit:

O HEAVENLY KING, O COMFORTER, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHO ART IN ALL PLACES AND FILLEST ALL THINGS; TREASURY OF GOOD THINGS AND GIVER OF LIFE, COME AND DWELL IN US AND CLEANSE US FROM EVERY STAIN, AND SAVE OUR SOULS, O GRACIOUS LORD.

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked "Master, how should we pray?" Jesus did not respond: "Just talk to me." I mean, they were talking to Him! Rather, as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke: "He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' And he said to them, 'When you pray, say: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name ...'"

As a rule, at a minimum, Orthodox Christians pray twice daily, morning and evening. It is not **JUST** a matter of making the sign of the Cross upon waking and before sleep, though it is that. It is not **JUST** a matter of offering thanks and asking blessing upon each meal, though it is that. It is not **JUST** a matter of crying out “Lord help me!” and/or mentioning our loved ones to God, though it is certainly that. Rather, as a rule, we should have a Rule of Prayer. This may differ for different people, depending on their station in life. Ask your Priest, Confessor, or Spiritual Father.

I remember a parishioner who once said: “Father, I need help with my Prayer Rule.” I said: “What’s your current practice?” He said: “Well, I say morning and evening prayers with the family; I pray the Hours at work and in the car; I pray Compline just before bed. I’m thinking of setting my alarm to get me up around 2 a.m. to pray the Midnight Office ... What do you think?” Believe me, if you ever want to see your Priest speechless, you might want to try this just for fun (although, God be praised, he was serious).

For others, setting aside those times of prayer, just once or twice daily, is a struggle. There’s a Russian saying: “The Church is near, but the roads are icy. The bar is far, but I’ll walk carefully.” We do the same justification when it comes to prayer. I often muse: “At my house, in the morning, I have to walk right past my icon corner to get to the coffee pot. I rarely miss the coffee pot.”

This brings up a good point ... the icon corner. Orthodox Christians set aside a place in their homes to pray. This special place, the prayer corner, is an extension of the altar of the Church. It is here that we say our prayers, both as a family and alone. Oh sure, we can pray anywhere. And yet, if you’ve done it you know it to be true: there’s nothing quite equal to standing before the icons and praying at your home altar when it comes to glorifying God and working out your salvation in prayer.

Let’s say you’ve set aside a place, hung the icons, and have a table or shelf there for holy objects (candle, holy water, holy oil, relics, blessed palms and other objects, etc.) ... now what? There are several wonderful options when it comes to Orthodox prayer books; there are prayers found in the back of the Orthodox Study Bible, in the Service book and the popular Pocket Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians. If you’re just getting started, or would like to further your commitment to Prayer, I would recommend the St. Philip’s Prayer Discipline.

The Prayer Discipline, a ministry of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, exists to provide a daily balanced rule of prayer for those who wish to deepen their spiritual life and to learn to pray as the faithful have done for generations and generations. Becoming a member of the Prayer Discipline is simple. After your own serious reflection and prayer, and, if you are already under the guidance of a spiritual Father, with his blessing, just use the contact information listed below. Every new member is provided with the Discipline’s Prayer Manual, which contains the form of prayer for every day and some sound Orthodox teaching; in addition, Fr. Michael Keiser’s wonderful book, **A BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO PRAYER: THE ORTHODOX WAY TO DRAW CLOSER TO GOD**, is included for the new member’s edification.

The Fellowship asks for a \$25.00 donation to cover these materials, postage and handling. Please make checks payable to: **FELLOWSHIP OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE** and send your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address to: Fr. Joseph Huneycutt, St. George Orthodox Church, 5311 Mercer, Houston, Texas 77005.



We’re in the process of revitalizing this ministry of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, the St. Philip’s Prayer Discipline, and we need your help! If you have questions or suggestions about St. Philip’s Prayer Discipline, let us know!

Of course, of your charity, we beg your prayers.

by Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt, Associate Pastor at St. George, Houston, is also author of Defeating Sin — Overcoming Our Passions and Changing Forever, published by Regina Orthodox Press.



Summer's Best Two Weeks!

See 2008 Camp Dates & Plan to Register Online

www.antiochianvillage.org/camp



Antiochian Village

SHARING THE FAITH

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

It has been a very busy fall for the staff of the Department. With the collaboration of the OCEC Teacher Training Department, we have trained teachers in ten

locations from San Francisco, California to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Our aim is to provide teachers with instructional techniques and a foundation in the faith. The students benefit, and the church school as well, since success in the classroom leads to teacher retention. The Departmental staff are not paid to provide these events, but do so from their dedication to God and Christian Education — may God bless our staff abundantly. Enjoy our photo gallery in this issue!

Creative Festival materials on the website now include posters, and an audio file, "Bless Them, O Lord." The song, by Gigi Shadid, was commissioned for this year's theme.

A blessed Nativity to all!

Carol A. Buleza

PODCAST OF GOSPEL NOW AVAILABLE

We are pleased to announce that the ever-popular "Antiochian Gospel Program" now offers audio files. A master storyteller, Kristina Wenger, tells the story of the Gospel for younger students and reads the Gospel for the older. After each, a few questions are posed. You can find these at www.antiochian.org/christianeducation, "Antiochian Gospel Program."

The Department of Christian Education newsletter is published in the months of September, December, February, and April.

The office is staffed from 9:00-3:00 Monday through Wednesday. Phone (717) 747-5221. FAX (717) 747-5832. E-mail: DCE@antiochian.org. Web page: www.antiochian.org/christianeducation

The Department gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of The Order of St. Ignatius which funds, in part, the programs and services we offer.

ST. JOHN THE FORERUNNER, CEDAR PARK, TEXAS

Participants from St. Elias, Austin, and St. Sophia, Dripping Springs, came together for the training August 25. Vasiliki Oldziey, trainer.



ST. THOMAS, SIOUX CITY, IOWA

On September 8, St. Thomas hosted teachers from St. Mary's parish in Omaha, and the Greek parishes in Sioux City, and Sioux Falls, Iowa. Vasiliki Oldziey, trainer.



Department of Christian Education

DIOCESAN COORDINATORS

Please contact the Diocesan Coordinators for updates on trainings and other events in your region.

Charleston, Oakland, PA & the East; New York and Washington DC:

V. Rev. George Alberts
(203)798-1771
frgeocar@sbcglobal.net

Toledo and the Midwest:

Robert Snyder
(330)493-4029;
bobsny1107@aol.com

Los Angeles and the West:

Joseph Tershay
(831)335-8350;
joseph Tershay@yahoo.com

Eagle River and the Northwest:

Linda Funk
(306)934-1695 lfunk@shaw.ca

Ottawa and Upstate New York:

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Wichita and Mid-America:

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(512)459-6264 vas@austin.rr.com

Worcester and New England:

Anna Hughes
(978)686-3274 matannah@aol.com

Miami and the Southeast:

Betty Randolph
(864)639-2204,
bettyrandolph@bellsouth.net

ST. ELIAS, OTTAWA, ONTARIO

On September 15, the Cathedral parish was pleased to host a training for 20 participants. Kh. Linda Funk was the trainer. Fr. Ghattas Hajal is planning to host a mini-Institute next year.



ST. GEORGE, HOUSTON

Participants from several Houston area churches came together for the advanced teacher training course on September 8. Vasiliki Oldziey, trainer.



SAN FRANCISCO: SECOND MINI-INSTITUTE, SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2007

The parish of St. Nicholas was honored to host His Grace Bishop Benjamin of Berkeley for their second mini-Institute. His Grace spoke on the theme of stories as vital to sharing the good news of our faith. Certificates were awarded for Basic and Advanced Teacher Training, and for coursework leading to the special certificate in Divine Liturgy. Eight parishes of various jurisdictions were present. Trainers for the nine courses were Fr. Michael Anderson of the OCA, Fr. Nicolas Borzhgol of the host parish, and Deacon Lee Haskins of Saints Peter and Paul, Ben Lomond, California, as well as Joseph Tershay, Kh. Linda Funk, Mat. Myra Kovalak, and Carole Buleza.



“I WANT TO BE ...”

by Carole Buleza

I AM
DISCOVERING
THAT WHAT I
TRULY WANT
IS THE ONLY
THING THAT
MAKES SENSE
IN THE FACE OF
MATERIALISM,
UNMET GOALS,
AND CONSTANT
ACTIVITY.
I WANT TO
BE HOLY.

“I want to be ...”

Have you ever uttered those words? How would you finish that phrase? Advertisers offer a hundred different products that promise to help us become someone new or different. Likewise, television programs such as “American Idol,” “America’s Next Top Model,” “What Not to Wear,” just to name a few that are seen in our household, allow us to see ordinary people transformed into their ideal.

So, what do you want to be?

I can finish the phrase with at least four words, without even blinking. I have an innate condition, that I am just now recognizing, which can be characterized by the very phrase itself — I can’t remember a time that I didn’t have in mind an ideal for myself, a goal to be reached, a challenge to be met. I derived great satisfaction from working toward my goals. Have I reached them? At this point in life, I can say “yes” for the major ones. I remain frustrated with my progress with several others — getting my family to keep the house neat, being more creative with dinner menus, meeting work deadlines on time. These dog me, quietly but persistently pulling my spirit down, year after year.

A few days ago, I examined this condition and realized that even my relationship with God was subservient to this phrase. Admittedly, I have not had much of a relationship with God recently. Even when I did pray, I typically ended with asking God’s help for the many things I wanted to accomplish: “Help me to be a better Mom,” or “Help me finish this project today.” I longed for the days when I was single, and able to spend a lot of time reading scripture, attending church services, and writing in my journal. There was a day, many, many years ago, when I sat looking at the ocean and gave my life to Christ, for His service. I felt joy and peace that day. I felt His presence. Once, on a retreat during those years, we were asked to complete the phrase, “More than anything, I need ...”; I wrote, “More than anything, I need to feel God’s presence.”

Now I serve God, notably, as the Director of the Department of Christian Education. He responded to my offer! I serve God as a wife, mother and daughter as well. I “want to be” better at several

things in both areas of my life. I can’t say that having these goals is a bad thing, at first glance; but, in reality something is not right. I am seldom “at peace,” and always longing for joy. I am blessed in so many very important ways, and yet ... after years of striving to reach goals, I no longer find satisfaction in the process. I seem to have arrived at an impasse. What do I really want?

The answer came to me several times over the last few months, and I resisted thinking about it, even saying it, but now I have. I want to be holy. If this were the game “truth or dare,” my statement would qualify as both.

Saying “I want to be holy” makes me afraid. I know the saints were “different,” because they were holy. Do I want to be changed? Will I “stand out?” What will happen if I draw close to God? Do I dare?

This being the December issue of The WORD, I intended to write an article about Christ’s birth. I was drawing a blank.

It’s not that I didn’t have inspiration — the stores have had decorations up since mid-October. Strangely enough, I, who love to shop, have not had much interest lately in all the merchandise, sales flyers, and catalogs. I guess I have enough stuff. What I truly want cannot be bought. I am discovering that what I truly want is the only thing that makes sense in the face of materialism, unmet goals, and constant activity. I want to be holy.

Looking back, I suppose I have written a Christmas article. Jesus Christ became man to show us the way to God, to invite us to become partakers of the divine nature by grace. Because of His birth, we have the amazing opportunity to be holy. Because of Christ’s birth, “I want to be holy” is not a ridiculous phrase.

I have said the phrase to myself several times recently, and find it to be like the keel that steadies a ship. It levels me when my spirit is launching toward a “striving” campaign, or when my spirit is being pulled down by feelings of frustration or failure. I don’t feel that I should strive for this in the same way I have towards other goals. Although holiness is not spoken of these days, I have found companionship for my journey in the words of the Book of Psalms. What will happen next, I don’t know.

IF THIS WERE
THE GAME
“TRUTH OR DARE,”
MY STATEMENT WOULD
QUALIFY AS BOTH.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

FALCONE, Dr. John to the diaconate on September 27, 2007 and to the priesthood on September 28, 2007 by Bishop BASIL at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, KS. He is assigned to the pastorate of St. Columba Church, Lafayette, CO, effective October 1, 2007.

HOWELL, Deacon Stephen to the priesthood on October 20, 2007 by Bishop JOSEPH at St. Athanasius Church, Sacramento, CA.

WHITCOMB, Deacon Polycarp to the priesthood on October 21, 2007 by Bishop JOSEPH at St. Athanasius Church, Sacramento, CA.

BAZ, Subdeacon Charles to the diaconate on September 16, 2007 by Metropolitan PHILIP at St. Nicholas Church, Bridgeport, CT. He is attached to St. John Chrysostom Chapel, Englewood, NJ.

MATAR, Subdeacon Paul to the diaconate on October 7, 2007 by Metropolitan PHILIP at St. John of Damascus Church, Dedham, MA. He is completing his studies at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

MEYERS, Subdeacon Nicholai (Kevin) to the diaconate on September 26, 2007 by Bishop JOSEPH at St. Tikhon's Monastery, South Canaan, PA.

SABA, Subdeacon Fouad to the diaconate on October 7, 2007 by Bishop MARK at St. George Church, Cicero, IL.

TERSHEY, Subdeacon John (Ronald) to the diaconate on September 30, 2007 by Bishop JOSEPH at St. Nicholas Church, San Francisco, CA. He is assigned to that parish.

SAYEGH, Emile Paul to the diaconate on Sunday, November 25, 2007 by Metropolitan PHILIP at the Virgin Mary Church in Yonkers, NY, where he is attached.

ELEVATED

FARIS, Priest Leonard to the dignity of Archimandrite on October 28, 2007 by Bishop ANTOUN at St. George Church, Lowell, MA.

ELLISON, Priest James to the dignity of Archpriest on September 30, 2007 by Bishop MARK at St. Nicholas Church, Urbana, IL.

LOURIE, Priest Stephen to the dignity of Archpriest on October 7, 2007 by Bishop THOMAS at St. George Church, Altoona, PA.

APPOINTED

SHPORTUN, Archpriest Peter as Dean of St. George Cathedral, Coral Gables, FL.

WYATT, Priest Mark to St. Nicholas in Montreal, QC.

ATTACHED

RIHANI, Fr. Malek to All Saints Church, Chicago, IL, effective immediately.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

THOMAS, Priest Daniel, formerly of Sts. Peter and Paul Mission, Boone, NC, effective October 15, 2007.

VAN BRONKHORST, Fr. Stephen, formerly of St. Catherine of Alexandria Mission, Ann Arbor, MI effective October 15, 2007. He will be attached to Holy Cross Mission, Dor, MI.

RELEASED

TASSOS, Priest Michael to the Orthodox Church in America, effective October 24, 2007.

LAICIZED

HINES, former priest Kenneth, effective October 2, 2007.

DEPOSED

ZWEERS, former deacon John of Felton, CA, effective October 17, 2007.

AWARDED

The Antonian Silver Medal to Chakeep SKAFF on October 28, 2007 by Bishop ANTOUN at St. George Church, Lowell, MA.

Beloved in Christ,

God bless you.

Thank you to all of you who extended me warm and prayerful greetings on the occasion of the feast of the Holy Apostle Thomas. May God grant many years to all of you and your families. Please keep me in your holy prayers.

Yours in Christ,

+Bp. Thomas



The late
Metropolitan
Gabriel of Paris

METROPOLITAN GABRIEL

(Saleeby), 82 of Paris, Archbishop of the Antiochian Archdiocese of Western and Central Europe, has fallen asleep in Christ. His Funeral and burial took place in Paris on Friday October 26, 2007. Metropolitan Gabriel was born in the Lebanese mountain town of Souq al-Gharb in 1925 and received his theological education in Russia. He was elected bishop and consecrated to the sacred episcopacy on August 22, 1966, and served as auxiliary to the late Metropolitan ELIA (Saleeby) of Beirut. In 1980 he was assigned Patriarchal Vicar for the growing Antiochian Orthodox presence in Western Europe, eventually relocating to Paris in 1982. In establishing the Vicariate Bishop Gabriel fully employed his considerable linguistic gifts, being a fluent speaker of Arabic, English, French, Spanish, German and Russian. In 1998 he was inducted into the prestigious "Legion d'honneur" by the French State in recognition of his contribution to French society. In the fall of 2000 the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch elevated the Vicariate of Western and Central Europe to the status of an Archdiocese and Bishop Gabriel to the dignity of a Metropolitan Archbishop. Under his care the Archdiocese has grown to include dozens of parishes (with over thirty in Germany alone) and a monastic community of eighteen nuns in the south of France. May his memory be eternal.

WORD Donations

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Bishop Athanasius Saliba | \$500.00 |
| Donna and Robert Hardy | 500.00 |
| Frank and Tina Adcock | 50.00 |
| Lori and Brian Cavalier | 50.00 |
| Norma Abdallah | 100.00 |
| In memory of George Abdallah | |
| Dr. Elias Hebeke | 1000.00 |
| Mansour Rayan | 500.00 |
| Kh. Marguerite Shaheen | 100.00 |
| Phillip Sleiman, Ottawa | 40.00 |
| Samir N. Shamiyeh | 80.00 |
| Fouad and Rima Tarazi | 50.00 |
| Dave Tax | 500.00 |

Metropolitn PHILIP

sincerely thanks all those who
extended their greetings to him
on the occasion of
his name' s day.

JACK G. SHAHEEN 2008 MASS COMMUNICATIONS SCHOLARSHIPS

11th Consecutive Year (join the 31 previous awardees)

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A one-page statement explaining your goals and stating that you are a U.S. citizen, you are of Arab heritage and why you merit the scholarship.

Two original signed letters of recommendation from mass communications professors.

Copies of your articles, videos, films, etc. (The items will not be returned to you.)

Official academic transcripts including your GPA.

Permanent home address, phone number, e-mail address, phone number during the school year.

DEADLINE: April 1, 2008

(Incomplete or late applications will not be accepted.)

SUBMIT ALL MATERIALS TO:

ADC Research Institute
Attn: Dr. Nawar Shora
1732 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Telephone: 202-244-2990

daily devotions DECEMBER, 2007 Very Rev. George Alberts

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. GALATIANS 5:22-6:2; LUKE 12:32-40 (fast) | 11. HEBREWS 4:1-13; MARK 8:22-26 (fast) | 22. GALATIANS 3:8-12; LUKE 13:18-29 (fast) |
| 2. EPHESIANS 6:10-17; MATTHEW 22:22-14 (fast) | 12. HEBREWS 13:17-21; LUKE 6:17-23 (fast) | 23. HEBREWS 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40; MATTHEW 1:1-25 (fast) |
| 3. 2 TIMOTHY 2:20-26; LUKE 20:27-44 (fast) | 13. HEBREWS 7:1-6; MARK 9:10-18 (fast) | 24. HEBREWS 1:1-12; LUKE 2:1-20 (fast) |
| 4. GALATIANS 3:23-29; MARK 5:24-34 (fast) | 14. HEBREWS 7:18-25; MARK 9:33-41 (fast) | 25. GALATIANS 4:4-7; MATTHEW 2:1-12 Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ |
| 5. 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-22; LUKE 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24 (fast) | 15. EPHESIANS 2:11-13; LUKE 14:1-11 (fast) | 26. HEBREWS 2:11-18; MATTHEW 2:13-23 |
| 6. HEBREWS 13:17-21; LUKE 6:17-23 (fast) | 16. COLOSSIANS 3:4-11; LUKE 14:16-24 (fast) | 27. ACTS 6:8-15, 7:1-5, 47-60 MATTHEW 21:33-42 |
| 7. TITUS 1:15-2:10; LUKE 21:37-22:8 (fast) | 17. HEBREWS 8:7-13; MARK 9:42-10:1 (fast) | 28. JAMES 2:1-13; MARK 2:1-12 |
| 8. EPHESIANS 1:16-23; LUKE 13:18-29 (fast) | 18. HEBREWS 9:8-10, 15-23; MARK 10:2-12 (fast) | 29. 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16; MATTHEW 12:15-21 |
| 9. GALATIANS 4:22-31; LUKE 13:10-17 (fast) | 19. HEBREWS 10:1-18; MARK 10:11-16 (fast) | 30. GALATIANS 1:11-19; MATTHEW 2:13-23 |
| 10. HEBREWS 3:5-11, 17-19; MARK 8:11-21 (fast) | 20. HEBREWS 10:35-11:7; MARK 10:17-27 (fast) | 31. JAMES 2:14-26, MARK 12:13-17 |
| | 21. HEBREWS 11:8, 11-16; MARK 10:23-32 (fast) | |

daily devotions JANUARY, 2007 Very Rev. George Alberts

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|---|---|---|
| 1. COLOSSIANS 2:8-12 LUKE 2:20-21, 40-52 | 13. EPHESIANS 4:7-13; MATTHEW 4:12-17 | 24. HEBREWS 10:35-11:7; MARK 9:10-16 |
| 2. JAMES 3:11-4:6; MARK 12:28-37 | 14. HEBREWS 2:26-8:2; JOHN 4:9-16 | 25. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11; JOHN 10:9-16 (fast) |
| 3. JAMES 4:7-5:9; MARK 12:38-44 | 15. HEBREWS 4:1-13; LUKE 21:12-19 | 26. EPHESIANS 5:1-8; LUKE 14:1-11 |
| 4. 1 PETER 1:1-2, 10-12; MARK 13:1-8 | 16. HEBREWS 5:11-6:5; LUKE 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24 (fast) | 27. HEBREWS 7:26-28, 8:1-2; LUKE 18:35-43 |
| 5. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-27; LUKE 3:1-16 (fast) | 17. HEBREWS 13:17-21; LUKE 6:17-23 | 28. HEBREWS 11:17-23, 27-31; MARK 9:42-10:1 |
| 6. TITUS 2:11-14, 3:4-7; MATTHEW 3:13 | 18. HEBREWS 13:7-16; MATTHEW 5:14-19 (fast) | 29. HEBREWS 12:20-28, 13:22-25; MARK 10:2-12 |
| 7. ACTS 19:1-8; JOHN 1:29-34 | 19. EPHESIANS 2:11-13; LUKE 13:18-29 | 30. HEBREWS 13:7-16; MATTHEW 5:14-19 (fast) |
| 8. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-4:4; LUKE 19:45-46 | 20. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-15; LUKE 17:12-19 | 31. JAMES 1:19-27; MARK 10:17-27 |
| 9. 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-22; LUKE 20:1-8 (fast) | 21. HEBREWS 8:7-13; MARK 8:11-21 | |
| 10. TITUS 1:5-2:1; LUKE 20:9-18 | 22. HEBREWS 9:5-10, 15-23; MARK 8:22-26 | |
| 11. TITUS 1:15-2:10; LUKE 20:19-28 (fast) | 23. HEBREWS 10:1-18; MARK 9:30-34 (fast) | |
| 12. EPHESIANS 5:10-17; MATTHEW 2:1-11 | | |

ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

The Be-attitudes of a Servant

Our beautiful Lord, the Servant of all, instructs us that, “whoever desires to become great among men, let him be your servant and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and who gives his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45).

As Antiochian women, we are called to a life of service to our Lord and to His people. Since the order of Deaconess has not been reinstated in the Church as yet (perhaps one day it will), as Antiochian Women we are called to fulfill that ministry in the Church by serving one another. The word deacon or deaconess means “to serve.” The footnotes in the Orthodox Study Bible (p. 3), read, “Service is characteristic of true greatness. The model is Christ’s incarnate life and death: the perfect man is the perfect servant.” When our Lord washed His apostles’ feet, He said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (John 13:15, 16).

There is no greater example of this kind of servitude among women than the Queen of Heaven, our Blessed Lady Theotokos. Her whole life was lived in service to God and to mankind. From the time Mary was dedicated to God by her parents Joachim and Anna where she was three years old, she was raised in the Temple. When the time came for her to leave the Temple, which, in accordance with the Jewish Law, was at the age of puberty, the Temple priests betrothed her to the elderly (80 years old), pious, and righteous Joseph. He was to become her guardian from society; no man could dare approach her now. Mary had sanctified herself to God and had told the priests that she wished never to marry, but to remain a virgin for all of her life. Her betrothal to Joseph ensured that the

desire of her heart be granted. Other young girls were dedicated by their parents to God and raised in various chambers of the Temple as well. But, none was raised in the Holy of Holies like Mary. In the book *The Life of the Virgin Mary*, the Theotokos, her daily routine is described as follows: “From the morning [6:00 a.m.] until 9:00 a.m. she remained in prayer; from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., she was occupied with her weaving; and from 3:00 p.m., she again applied herself to prayer. She did not retire from praying until the appearance of the angel of the Lord (Gabriel) after the 9th hour or after 3:00 p.m., from whose hand she received food. Thus, she refreshed herself only once daily with that food brought by the Archangel. The food that she received from the priests was distributed among the poor.

Mary meditated and nourished her soul on Scripture day and night. None exceeded her in praise and vigils of God and no one was more learned in the Wisdom of the law of God. No one was more lowly in humility, more elegant in singing and more perfect in all virtue ... Being



submissive and obedient to all, she offended no one and was friendly to all. She never said a crude word to anyone and did not allow any unclean thought ...

None saw Mary ever angry nor heard her speak evil. All of her conversations were full of grace. She was ever occupied in prayer or in searching the law. She was anxious also about her companions, lest any should sin even in one word or raise her voice in senseless laughter or should be in the wrong, or proud before their parents. Moreover, she herself feared to even inadvertently offend or appear proud before her peers." [Mary was always concerned about the salvation of others; she demonstrated that when she agreed to become Christ's mother and again here when she displayed anxiety over her companions' potential to sin.]

"Mary blessed God without interruption and, lest per chance, even in greeting others she might cease from her praises to the Lord, she even answered then, praising God in her salutation, by saying: 'Thanks be to God' or 'Glory be to God'" (pp. 53-54). The custom of using this expression began with her.

Her entire life and body were offered for God's service and purposes. From the same book of her life, we read, "The Saviour had left His immaculate Mother among the living, so that by her presence, guidance, teaching and fervent prayers, the children of the Church might be established and increase" (p. 417). We learn from Tradition that she strengthened everyone, comforted all with the joy of her presence, encouraged many to die for the Lord and their Faith and others to live out their lives in virginity. She healed many sick, cast demons out of others, and gave alms to the poor constantly, showing great sympathy for widows. In fact, as she prepared to leave this world (her Son revealed to her three days before her death the time of her departure from this life), she gave her clothing to several poor widows she personally knew.

Mary is a perfect example of what it means to be a servant to all. Ruth, of the Old Testament, is another good example of what it means to be a servant. When Ruth's husband died, his death left her mother-in-law Naomi a true widow in that her husband and both her sons by this time were dead. With no man left in the family, Naomi had no way to support herself. Her daughter-in-law Ruth was a Gentile, not even an Israelite, and yet she was will-

ing to make Naomi's people her people and Naomi's God her God. Out of her deep love and respect for Naomi, Ruth made a decision to leave the land of her birth, Moab, and its people to accompany Naomi back to her people in Bethlehem. Ruth displayed rare character and she quickly won the affection, respect, and blessing of the Hebrew women who considered Ruth to be more valuable than 7 sons. This is absolutely amazing, since the number seven represents perfection, and the birth of sons was a sign of God's blessing. It took a remarkable foreigner to receive such adulation from Hebrew women. Ruth modeled two critical concepts: an awareness of God's involvement in life's details and a selfless concern for those closest to her, much like our Blessed Lady Theotokos, who was concerned for her peers and all of mankind. No doubt, Naomi's continual love, devotion and acknowledgment of God's personal involvement in all of life, was an incredible role model for Ruth in the midst of their heartaches of death.

As Antiochian Women, we are to set an example for all women around us. The Holy Scriptures are clear as to what our attitudes should be in "being a servant" to others. Both Mary Theotokos and Ruth exemplified these attitudes. Let's take a look at some of these attitudes that God expects us to have in our life of service to Him and His Church:

We are to serve God and Him only (Luke 4:8).

Our Lord, in rebuking the devil, quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, telling him, "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" As a man, Jesus was tempted, but never succumbed. Here, our Lord is making it clear to the devil that he was not willing to worship, nor serve him. Our Lord demonstrates that as a man he would serve God alone and obey His Law, the Holy Scriptures.

Joshua, who led the Israelites into the Promised Land, understood this. He said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Serving God is a choice.

When Jesus was about to be crucified, He told His disciples that no good fruit can be yielded if we do not die to ourselves, and that, just as a seed that dies produces much grain, so we must die to ourselves to gain eternal life. Mary died to herself. She gave her life entirely over to God. Ruth sacrificed

to care for Naomi, thus dying to her own wants and needs and serving the other. She chose to serve God by serving her mother-in-law. In the parable of the Last Judgment, our Lord tells us that “What you do to the least of these my brethren, you do unto me” (Matt. 25:31-44). How does this translate for us Antiochian Women in the 21st century? Practically, it means we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, take in strangers, visit prisoners, etc. Since we are created in the similitude of God, we serve the God in each one of us when we serve each other. Such an attitude

“The Saviour had left His immaculate Mother among the living, so that by her presence, guidance, teaching and fervent prayers, the children of the Church might be established and increase”

toward serving others does not go unnoticed by God, for He has said: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26). In serving each other, we serve the Christ in each of us, and our Heavenly Father notices how we treat His Son. The degree of honor we show His Son in each other, is the degree of honor with which His Father will honor us. Since Christ came to serve and not to be served, this is what we Antiochian Women aspire to do as well.

We are to serve God with all our heart.

Israel’s great Judge Samuel gave instructions to God’s people on how to serve God. He said: “Serve with all your heart” (1 Samuel 12:20) and not half-heartedly. St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that we are “to serve the Lord with no distractions” (7:35). Our Lord teaches us in Matthew 6:24 that we are to serve God wholly: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” We cannot give our full attention to or be loyal to two different masters, i.e. to God and to the things of this world. Our alle-

giance must be to one or the other. We must serve God with all our heart, as Mary Theotokos did.

We are to serve each other in love.

St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians (5:13), “... through love serve one another.” And in his first letter to the Church at Corinth (13:4-8), St. Paul defines the kind of love with which we are to serve each other as Antiochian Women: we are to be kind to one another, having no envy or jealousy, nor displaying any kind of arrogance. We are not to boast of what we do, but to boast of the accomplishments of others. When we parade our own learning and choose to be at the center of everything, we are children of vainglory. As Antiochian Women, we are not to be rude to anyone, nor are we to insist on our own agendas or feel that our own opinions are more important than the pinions of others. St. Paul also teaches us that love is not easily provoked. As Antiochian Women, we need to be tolerant of one another, thinking no evil of the other nor rejoicing when another sins. Instead, we need to bear all things together in loving submission to the Will of God; to endure all things through His Grace, to believe all things because “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27), and lastly to hope in all things, since Christ is our Hope and with Him and in Him, there is nothing over which to despair. Love never fails because God is Love.

St. James in his epistle (3:14-18) describes the kind of righteousness that we, as women of God, are to keep moving towards and ultimately embrace: “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Our Holy Mother lived it and as “children of righteousness” we are called to live our lives accordingly. When we as Antiochian Women can fully understand the impact of Love, we will change the world around us and preserve the Church and the Faith inviolate.

We are to serve God and each other with sincerity of heart.

In his letter to the Ephesians (6:5-7), St. Paul describes what our attitude should be in serving those in authority over us and each other: "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters (our bosses, our bishops, our priests, etc.) according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men." God does not read our lips, but our hearts. He looks for the sincerity of our heart. When we try to please man, we cannot please God, but conversely, if we please God, we will be pleasing to man. Since God reads our hearts, He knows where we are doing something for personal gain, satisfaction or reward. As Antiochian Women, we are to serve each other in sincerity of heart as unto the Lord Himself, with no desire for pushing our own personal agendas but always seeking to do the will of God, and His only, from our hearts.

We are to serve the Lord with all humility (Acts 20:19).

St. John Climacus in his Ladder of Divine Ascent tells us that to serve the Lord in all humility is to acknowledge the achievements of others instead of our own; to acknowledge that we are the least important person in the world and the greatest sinner; to see ourselves as being weak and helpless without the Lord; to be the first to end a quarrel and apologize even if we were not at fault; to be willing to abdicate our own will for the Will of the Father. As Antiochian Women, we can manifest this kind of humility by entrusting all that we do to God in prayer and then accepting whatever happens as God's Divine Will. When we need to have our opinion heard all the time, the Church Fathers teach this is due to loving ourselves too much and exposes our inner pride and lack of humility. And, when we do a service within the Church and expect to be thanked, again we are showing a lack of humility in that it is to God that thanks should be rendered, since in and of ourselves, we are nothing and can do nothing (John 15:5).

We are to serve the Lord with gladness.

In King David's Psalm 100:2, he tells us: "serve the Lord with gladness." Whatever we do in the church, whether sweeping the floor, emptying the garbage, cleaning the church, singing in the choir or chanting, or perhaps being a greeter, welcom-

ing new people into the church, no matter how we serve the Lord we should do it with joy and gladness in our hearts, never grumbling nor complaining. Archimandrite Seraphim Alexiev, in his book *Strife and Reconciliation*, tells us that "All grumbling comes from the devil." St. James, the Brother of the Lord, writes in his epistle (5:9): "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door." As Antiochian Women, we have to model for other women what it means to "serve the Lord with gladness." All judgment has been given to the Son, Jesus Christ, since He became incarnate as a man. Only a man can judge mankind since, as man, Christ understands the weakness of our flesh. The Theotokos never grumbled; nor did Ruth. Both women served with sincere gladness, caring more for others than themselves.

We are to serve the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians (5:16-19), St. Paul tells us to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit." When we grumble and complain, we quench the Holy Spirit in our lives and invite the demons instead.

St. Paul was content in all things, even when he was imprisoned: "... for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content (Phil 4:11). St. Euphrosynos, the cook, was content in all things, and God, through him, taught the abbot and the other brothers at the monastery what is meant by "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The abbot learned in a dream that Euphrosynos, that simple cook, held the keys to the kingdom of God because he was content always, offering praise and thanksgiving to God for all things in his life.

With the help of God, we can do all things. As Antiochian Women, we will show honor to our Blessed Lady Theotokos and emulate her life if we learn to adopt these essential attitudes in serving God and His people, His Church. Christ, as man, came to serve and not to be served. We can attain true greatness if we are willing to be a servant to all through Christ by serving Him in others. Glory be to God for all things!

by Joy Corey

FELLOWSHIP OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

When a gap opened in the Worcester Diocese Parish Life Conference rotation last year, many of our assumptions about what the Fellowship “is” and what it can do were put to the test. What we found was an organization more capable and ready to step up where and when it was needed than most might have expected. We found an organization that drew from all quarters of our Church, bringing diverse talents and contributions that, when taken as a whole, showed us all what a vibrant, living Church can look like at a diocesan level. It also illuminated the new focus areas of the Fellowship, demonstrating both their rightness and their achievability.

Operating with co-chairs was invaluable. Between Paul Nahass and myself, along with former Fellowship President, Jamil Samara, and spiritual advisor, Fr. Michael Abdelahad, we had a certain “unity of faith” from the outset of our planning. With an idea to build programs around a keynote speaker — something that hadn’t been done in New England before — and with an eye toward the Fellowship focus of Missions and Outreach, we invited Fr. Michael Keiser of the Archdiocese Department of Missions and Evangelism to give a series of addresses throughout the weekend. What I took away from Fr. Michael’s addresses was that, central to fulfilling our Lord’s Great Commission is nurturing Christian love and patience within ourselves, and then opening up our hearts and minds to follow God’s call.

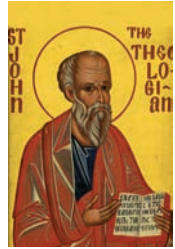
I honestly believe that the shared responsibilities we had from the outset were the key to the overflowing fruitfulness of our conference. Not only did they give truth to the adage, “many hands make light work,” but the act of sharing in these responsibilities, having to trust and rely on one another, and putting ourselves in the trust of others, engendered a spirit of Christian love in the very organization of the conference. And developing those bonds of friendship within our organizing committee overflowed into the spirit of the conference, imbuing every event with a warmth we could only have hoped for.

On our committee, there were “old hands” and new. Our desire was to build a conference that we would enjoy ourselves. Revamping the schedule was seen as a top priority — some believed things had gotten stale in New England and, given our geographic closeness,

this is perhaps unavoidable. How could we get folks to drive the short distance to Plymouth, but stay for the weekend? It was agreed that Thursday evening should be something special. The year prior, St. George of West Roxbury held a Game Night, which was enjoyed by everyone. It was low-key, but very social. Our committee discussed the matter at length, and it was decided that a natural pairing with game night would be to precede the games with the Bible Bowl. Many felt that a welcome dinner (underwritten to keep down the cost) would be an excellent way to kick off the conference. Paul and I thought a free ice cream social afterwards would (literally and figuratively) sweeten the draw. Now, we knew we would have pretty solid participation in the Bible Bowl, and that some parents and siblings of participants might attend. And we were told by others to expect that advance ticket sales would only be about half of our actual numbers. But even Monday and Tuesday the week of the conference, our very experienced event chairs were quite sure we would have “maybe” 75 folks at the game night/ice cream social. By the time I emerged from the planning meeting with the hotel staff Thursday morning, we were already up to nearly 100 attendees. I ran to the sales office several times, as our numbers crept up and up throughout the middle of the day. I was told they probably would not be able to accommodate more than 125 for dinner and dessert. When we hit 130, I stopped running to the office. I believe we would up with nearly 150 folks at the Bible Bowl and game night. The original name of the event was “Are You Game?” Apparently, everybody was!

This made me think: although the Fellowship focus of Unity is generally understood to mean jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction, we really developed an internal unity in our own diocese. In perhaps the same way that Fr. Keiser spoke of working personally and internally before (or in tandem with) turning “outward,” so we were creating and furthering an internal unity within our diocese, that we can now turn outward to the greater goal of fuller Orthodox unity. The warmth that was felt by so many in Plymouth cannot but spread outward.

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

My House for the Lord's House

Every day reveals new discoveries. For me, often it's meeting exceptional Orthodox Christians and, through them, gaining a deeper understanding of our precious Orthodox Faith.

Some months ago, Fr. Thomas Hopko gave me a wonderful tape of his talk about almsgiving (*The Meaning of Alms in the Christian Life*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press). Only since I began serving the Archdiocese as Director of Planning and Future Development, have I begun to understand the profound distinction between charitable giving for worthy humanitarian causes and giving to the Church as an essential act of our faith. In other words, first and foremost, we give financial support to the Church because we need to give for our own salvation, not because the Church needs our money.

Fr. Hopko explains that, in the command to "Love the Lord with all your heart and all your might," our "might" includes other possessions. Loving the Lord with all our might (our possessions) means using (giving) our possessions for God's work.

Wealth is given to us, so that we may belong to God.

While in southern California this fall, I experienced countless discoveries. The discovery I'm sharing with you now I found to be both remarkable and humbling. At least three families in a single parish have legally arranged to leave their homes to the church when they fall asleep in the Lord. One couple and one widow, both with many children and grandchildren, are grateful that their children are established and cared for, and therefore do not need the inheritance. The third person is a single individual. The couple has also left a second house for the Archdiocese!

What motivated these dear people? What do these faithful have in common? I asked their priest, Fr. Nicholas Speier of St. Athanasius in Goleta, California, and then spoke with two of these pious people. First, **Orthodoxy is central in their lives.** They strive continually to live a Christ-like life, and make their life decisions accordingly. Secondly, **their giving is tithe-oriented.** Tithing is a core practice: giving the first and best fruits to God.

The single gentleman told me that because he tithes, he feels blessed by God, and how God has allowed the St. Athanasius community to prosper. "Everything belongs to God, whether you know it or not. To me, the

Kingdom of God is the first thing in my life, and the Church is the expression of it in this world. When you tithe with faith," he said, "you will be blessed."

This man eagerly supports key ministries which will bring more Americans to Orthodoxy sooner. To do so in his lifetime, he refinanced his home in order to make substantial donations to missions and evangelism, plus the local church expansion and St. John of Damascus K-8 Orthodox school. He has also invested in order to "grow" his funds and make additional contributions.

I hope you are inspired by the quiet, powerful witness to Orthodoxy of these three families. They have bequeathed their homes so that the Lord's work continues long after they have fallen asleep in the Lord. I encourage you to prayerfully make similar arrangements in your will, trust or estate plans for your parish and the vital Archdiocesan programs.

Be sure you have a will. January is the month when most wills are written or updated. The impact of your bequest gift will endure for decades.

For information or a confidential discussion on how you can *Leave a Lasting Legacy for Orthodoxy*, make a planned gift, a bequest or donate to the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, please contact:

Ruth Ann Skaff, Director of Planning & Future Development

866-765-7001

development@antiochian.org

LEGAL NAME:

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

358 Mountain Road

Englewood, NJ 07631

Please use this name in all wills, deeds and written documents designating a gift or bequest to the Archdiocese. The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is chartered as a religious corporation by the State of New York, and recognized as a 501 © 3 organization by the IRS.

Note: In forthcoming issues, I will discuss in detail the Christian Education Endowment, Missions and Evangelism Endowment, Youth Ministry Endowment and the status of their works and the Three Endowments Campaign.



ATTENTION ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AGE 70^{1/2} & OLDER

This
month
left to
act:
Pension
Protection
Act of
2006



Last year, President Bush signed into law the Pension Protection Act of 2006. While the primary aim of this act focuses on pension reform, with it came a short-termed window of opportunity to donate funds to charity from an IRA without any negative tax consequence.

That incentive, which was part of the 2006 Pension Protection Act, is scheduled to expire at the end of the year. If you plan to use this opportunity, do so now. Although many organizations such as the Council on Foundations, the National Committee on Planned Giving, and Independent Sector have been pushing for its extension, we cannot guarantee it will be extended.

More specifically, individuals over the age of 70½ can gift up to \$100,000 directly from their IRA to their charity without having to recognize the value of the IRA distribution as income. Even more advantageous, qualified distributions to charity may be applied to offset the IRA owner's required minimum distribution for the year!

What's the catch? Individuals only have through the end of 2007 to take advantage of this law and make a difference with our local parishes and Archdiocese.

- Rollovers allow people 70½ and older to transfer distributions now from their IRAs to qualified charitable organizations. Donors may transfer up to \$100,000 directly from their IRAs.
- Donors who do not need their required minimum distributions can transfer these directly to charity and avoid paying any income tax. Whatever amount they give counts toward their required distributions as long as they haven't already received their distribution in 2007.
- The distribution generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so even those who do not itemize their tax deductions receive the benefit.

I encourage each of you reading this article who are over age 70½ and have any type of qualified retirement plan to discuss this matter with your tax advisor and financial professional to determine if making a gift from an IRA to your parish and Archdiocese is right for you.

As always, please contact me for a confidential discussion concerning your personal gift plans.

Ruth Ann Skaff, Director of Planning & Future Development
Toll-Free Phone: 866-765 7001
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*Ruth Ann Skaff
Archdiocese Director of Planning and Future Development.*

FELLOWSHIP OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

Continued from Page 28

I could go on and on about the planning involved in so many of the events, our picnic at Myles Standish State Park, the challenges of trying to plan around New England weather (it was a clear day in the end!), the vicissitudes of park rangers and entertainers, not to mention planning a cookout during a fast. From the haffi, to the "karaoke cruise," to "Umoo Tony's Café" (the re-christened Enliven to Christ), everyone went the extra mile, and it showed. But the great reward of everything surpassing expectations is something that everyone involved could feel. All of this taken together — the rolling-up of sleeves for a common goal, the edification from our guest speakers, our terrific oratorical contestants, the beautiful liturgy and services around the presence of Bishop Antoun, not to mention the straightforward fellowship and fun had by everyone at so many events and in-between — these all contribute to **Spiritual Renewal.**

As the Fellowship in New England moves forward from Plymouth, the seeds have been planted of not only so many ideas and directions for what we might do, but just as importantly, that we CAN do them, and do them well, if we work together in the love that Christ has given us.

*Michael Marge is President of the Fellowship of
St. John the Divine, Diocese of Worcester.*

SACRED MUSIC DEPARTMENT

"Psalmody has been given us that we may rise from the sensory to the intelligible and true." —St. Gregory of Sinai

Could you imagine a Liturgy where everything that is done is read, not sung? How long would it be before you started looking at your watch? And despite the theological and spiritual significance of the Divine Liturgy itself, you would probably find yourself bored and perhaps not elevated to the heights to which we are called to ascend during Liturgy.

Music gives the people of the Church the ability to ascend into God's Heavenly Kingdom in the Divine Liturgy. When done prayerfully, music helps the spirit transcend the cares of this world and participate fully in the heavenly activities that occur during Divine Liturgy.

December is "Choir Appreciation Month" in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. Whether your church has congregational singing, chanters, a small choir, or a choir of 30 or more, they help you to pray and to praise God during the services. Think of how austere it would be without them. Give thanks to God for them and take some time to thank them yourself. Perhaps your church can do something special for your choir and chanters this month. How about having the congregation sing "God Grant You Many Years" to the choir! St. Augustine said, "Those who sing, pray twice."

If you enjoy singing and are not part of the choir at present, why not contact the choir director about joining? Choirs are always grateful for those who wish to lift their voices up in song, not simply as someone volunteering to help out for a while, but rather as faithful stewards of the talent and grace of God given to each one of us. We should not bury this talent, but use it and allow it to help bring others to the worship and praise of our God.

The Sacred Music Department has a number of resources that can help you and all your church musicians to add to the richness of your services. Our web site, www.antiochian.org/music, contains music for the entire Divine Liturgy, Vespers, and special selections for feast days and saints' days. There is new music being added frequently. The Sacred Music Institute is a seminar to help church musicians learn and improve their skills in a fun and nurturing environment. The Institutes are held annually at the Antiochian Village, and bi-annually on the west coast. Diocesan music workshops may also be held in your Diocese. Contact your Diocesan music coordinator for more information on the workshops. Diocesan music coordinators are also available to assist you with the music in your church. Whether

you need to find new music for your choir or if you need some tips on getting started with the eight tones, your Diocesan music coordinator can help you.

For more information on contacting your Diocesan music coordinator, please contact the Chairman of the Sacred Music Department, Christopher Holwey, by going to www.antiochian.org/music, and clicking on the contact link at the bottom of the page.

by Nancy Hanna Long

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ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Judges' Choice-Diocese of Ottawa,
Eastern Canada and Upstate New York
Danna Sawalha

It was an early Sunday morning at the usual 10:00

a.m. liturgy. The church priest walked through the royal doors as though he was preparing to give a homily, but rather began by giving a very brief introduction of his childhood friend. He told the parish that there would be a guest speaker with them that morning, and with that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak.

"A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific coast," he began, "when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high that even the father, an experienced sailor, could not keep the boat upright. The three were then swept into the ocean." The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. He continued, "grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life ... to which he would throw the other end of the line. He only had seconds to make his decision. The father knew his son was a Christian, and he also knew his son's friend was not. The agony of the decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves. As the father yelled out, 'I love you son,' he threw the line to his son's friend. By the time he pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son disappeared beyond raging swells into the black night. His body was never recovered."

This time the two teenagers were sitting straighter in the pew, waiting for the next words to come out of the old man's mouth. "The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son. How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us."

With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room. Within minutes after the service ended the two teenagers were at the man's side. "That was a nice story," politely started one of the boys, "but I don't think it was very realistic, was it?" "But I'm standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His son for me," the old man said. "You see ... I'm the son's friend."



Each person on this earth, at one time or another, will face a decision more complicated than at first perceived. If you were to ask any parent in this room their initial reaction I am sure he or she would instinctively choose to save their child, their own flesh and blood. It is tremendously difficult for a parent to see his or her child suffer in any degree, whether it is physically, mentally, or emotionally. One would assume the father would save his son without hesitation, but he took another perspective on the situation. He chose to take the side of a Christian who was precisely following the guidelines given to all the people in the Bible.

The father showed compassion toward the one who was most in need. We have learned through the teachings in the Bible that we are created in the image and likeness of God. It is our duty, therefore, to live our lives in a constant effort to achieve the perfection which He embodies. When God gave His Son to save this world, He did it to save us from our sins, but also to set an example for us. Each and every one of us should be willing to sacrifice our most precious possessions in the name of the Lord.

At times, like in the situation of this man, it may seem that the sacrifice is unbearable and overwhelming, but God is great and knows all, and would never put you or me in a situation which we are not strong enough to handle. As St. Paul so clearly declared, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). The Orthodox Church is the strength and support that keeps 6 million people on this continent and 250 million worldwide together in praise and worship, and also morals and values. You can go to a conference and meet another teen for the first time

and already know that you have so much in common just because of the faith that unifies you, despite what coast you live on.

Throughout the year, we host and attend pan-Orthodox events, and hear and learn more and more of our faith through different hymns and languages. I believe that the Orthodox Church can only be preserved and have an increase in unity as long as it does not lose sight of what is important and what our purpose is in this world: to love. We are the present and the future for Orthodox unity, and communication is the only way we can spread God's word as we are called to do.

Being in a unified Orthodox Church which teaches me to serve others and, above all, love, has helped me to become more cautious in my surroundings, make more beneficial decisions, and learn what is right from wrong. Many unfortunate teens fall into the trap of drugs, violence, and sex. It all comes down to just wanting to fit in. I have learned from the Church to continuously help my non-Orthodox peers with different struggles in their lives. It is the Orthodox Church that teaches me to avoid being impacted by superficial school groups, and to pay attention to what is really important.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once said, "Charity never humiliated him who profited from it, not ever bound him by the chains of gratitude, since it was not to him but to God that the gift was made." I belong to a humanitarian club called Key Club. I have accomplished so many good things that strengthened my faith, such as donating my hair to the Locks of Love foundation, and I spent countless hours after school quilting blankets for children in Pediatrics. This year, we also did a project to raise money for a student whose mother could not afford to pay the insurance for her chemotherapy. Part of what we sold was raffle tickets, where the first prize was a flat screen television. In this case, many people did want to help out the mother, but for those who really didn't know her or her family, it was an attempt to win a TV. Now, I am not saying that it is wrong to give people incentive to help; I was just so appalled at how many people would pay for a raffle ticket, just so they could win the TV. It is the plain and simple fact that in order to help someone in need, there usually has to be a "prize" involved. Through the Orthodox Church's teaching, I have been taught to do good things always, without ever expecting something material in return. In our endeavors to achieve even a mustard seed of the perfection which Christ epitomizes, we must use Him as the Chief Cornerstone, and build upon it. As St. James taught us, faith without works is dead. Our ultimate prize is everlasting life.

My best friend lost his mother to breast cancer this past March. She was always involved in her church. One thing she said to me over the phone that I will NEVER

forget was, "I want you to always keep an eye on my boy ... we all know the trouble he can land himself in." She didn't know exactly what God had in store for her, but she never complained about her difficult situation. About a week after she passed away, my friend was having issues with God. He didn't know why God would take away someone so special to him. I knew this was my opportunity to take her advice. I pulled him aside one day, and told him that God did not take his mother to make him hurt, but He took her so that she would not be hurting anymore. He slowly began grasping the concept, still unable to fully bear the outcome of his mother's death. Then one day I finally noticed that what I had said to him clicked. During English class he had opened his agenda, and in there I saw an icon of Jesus next to a picture of his mother. Without the support of a unified Orthodox Church, I probably would not have gotten myself through this situation, let alone my best friend. "God does not dispense strength and encouragement like a druggist fills your prescription. The Lord doesn't

We have learned through the teachings in the Bible that we are created in the image and likeness of God. It is our duty, therefore, to live our lives in a constant effort to achieve the perfection which He embodies

promise to give us something to take so we can handle our weary moments. He promises us Himself. That is all. And that is enough" (Charles W. Swindoll).

God is not asking us to sacrifice ourselves on a cross as He asked of His Son, but He did ask us to do the work of God on earth, and to be willing to sacrifice the ephemeral things of this world. That is the very purpose for existence. We must see His example and follow it with a whole heart. So, be willing to sacrifice, help those in need, and follow the guidance of our Lord, and the Kingdom of Heaven will be opened to each and every one of us.

If ever you feel God has put the line in your hands and you must decide to whom to throw it, do not forget that you must try and look at your situation from a selfless perspective. Be willing to sacrifice and help those in need. Follow the ultimate example given to us. The father in the story sacrificed his son and saved the soul of another. How great was this act?! Be ready to do the same, for each of us will be given the opportunity to show God that we have learned from Him, as we are called to build "up the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith ..." (Ephesians 4:12-13).

*Danna Sawalha, 17, is a member of
St. Elias Church, Syracuse, NY.*

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Church of the Redeemer Los Altos Hills, CA

Each and every one of us has probably had an event or activity this summer that they would like to talk about. I know that I have and was blessed with two memorable trips, the Holy Land and the Archdiocese convention in Montreal, which were the highlights of my summer.

Twenty pilgrims from the Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos Hills, California and I started our trip to the Holy Land on Monday, July 9th from the San Francisco Airport. Even before the trip began, we felt that it was going to be one to remember, and it was! We had a six hour layover in Paris, and following that, we continued on to the Holy Land. After a very long yet fun-filled flight, we arrived at the Tel Aviv airport. Thank God all of us passed through security without any major problems.

On our first morning at the Notre Dame Hotel, near the old city of Jerusalem, I awoke to the sounds of the bells ringing. I looked through the window and saw the most beautiful view of a cross on top of a church across the way. This was just one of many churches throughout the city. Seeing this holy land and hearing the bells, I started to reflect upon what was written in the Gospel — the entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem, His passion, His suffering, His death, and His glorious Resurrection. Our prepared schedule allowed us a daily chance to be in and experience some of the places where our Lord walked, taught, and performed some of His many miracles. We visited the sacred place where He was born, Bethlehem. We also visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Golgotha in the old city of Jerusalem; Mt. Olive, Jericho, The Sea of Galilee, Tiberius, Capernaum, the Mount of Beatitude, the Annunciation Church in Nazareth; Haifa, Mt. Carmel, and other wonderful places along the way.

One of the highlights of our trip was visiting Mt. Tabor, where our Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured. We gathered at the church, which has been in existence since the fourth century, and read the Gospel of Transfiguration. We prayed for all parish-

ioners and their families, especially due to our church's feast being that of the Transfiguration of our Lord.

On the second day of our trip, we were blessed to have been visited at our Hotel by the Archbishop Theodosios "AtallahHanna" (Archbishop of Sevastia). After we all had dinner with him, he welcomed us to the Holy Land and gave us spiritual direction as to how we, as Orthodox Christians, should visit these holy sites. He also shared with us the struggle which the patriarchate of Jerusalem is facing at this time. The Archbishop Theodosios "AtallahHanna" asked us at the end of his visit to convey his love to our beloved Metropolitan PHILIP, and to His Grace Bishop JOSEPH. It was such a great blessing and honor to serve Divine Liturgy on the first Sunday of our trip at the Holy Sepulcher; Vespers on the second Sunday at St. George Church in Ake; and the Divine Liturgy at the Annunciation Church in Nazareth.

Prior to our trip our parish and its organizations has gathered generous contributions to deliver to places in need in the Holy Land. In addition to these donations, there was also a collection made from St. George Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania to add to what was given. Khouria Minerva Sabbagh and her fourteen-year-old daughter, Hope accompanied us on our trip. We delivered these contributions to four needy institutions. These locations are the Four Homes of Mercy in Bethany, the Greek Orthodox Kindergarten in Bet Jalah, the Annahda Women's Association in Ramalleh, and the Orthodox Kindergarten of the Transfiguration Church in Ramalleh.

Our trip as a group ended on July 19th, however, I had the opportunity to stay in Nazareth, to participate in the wedding of a cousin of our beloved Basheer Salameh. In spite of all the difficulty the people face in the Holy Land, they celebrate their joyous occasions with overwhelming joy. From the Holy Land, I flew directly to Montreal, Canada, to attend the Archdiocese Convention. The theme for the Convention was, "Building up the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:12-13). The emphasis at the

convention was on unity within the church. It was a beautiful sight to see our beloved Metropolitan, with His Grace Bishop JOSEPH, and all the bishops of the local Holy Synod gathered together with all the faithful of this protected Archdiocese, in unity and harmony. The attendees of this convention felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and His leading power. After seeing the Christians in the Holy Land and their struggle with their Patriarchate, we should give great thanks to our Lord for what we have, and continue supporting and loving the church God has ordained to our lives.

In conclusion, the two trips were very spiritual and I believe they both will bear much fruit. I truly enjoyed our group of pilgrims on our trip to the Holy Land, and also was greatly fortified in being with my spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ as the Archdiocese Convention in Canada. I truly appreciated the hospitality of the people from the Holy Land and enjoyed being in company with many wonderful people. I can honestly say that reading the Gospels at every holy place and connecting the words to the land, led me to understand the Gospel readings in much more depth. Seeing the holy sites while praying made the trip so meaningful, and I pray that it will work for our salvation.

St. George, Montreal Quebec

One huge highlight of our year at St. George of Montreal was to honor Economos Antony Gabriel and Khouriye Lynn, on 45 years in the Priesthood (30 years at St. George, Montreal). Our Church has undergone huge transformation in the past thirty years. The church population has swelled to over 1000 families, and we are warm and cozy in the original building ... precious to the faithful, since the church was recently declared a Quebec Historical Landmark because of the unique architectural style rendered by White House Architect Emmanuel Briffa. Recently, closed-circuit TV's were installed in all the side pews and a big screen in the basement, to facilitate the overflow of parishioners.

Father always gives rousing sermons and challenges us to honor our past heritage and customs, to rejoice in the present with affirmative action, in family and community life, and to build for the future of our illustrious Church in North America. We have become a unified and loving family, suffering, laughing, singing, going through life together, and Father is the glue which holds us all together. He has returned to us over and over again, from tragedy to triumph, in a saga of a modern-day Job. To witness his strength is to witness the glory of the Kingdom.

On April 28, 2007 in Montreal, the World Lebanese Cultural Union presented to Father Antony, the "Golden Emigrante Award ... in recognition of all the efforts you deployed for more than three decades at the service of Lebanese in Montreal throughout your activities at Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church and the promotion and defense of the Lebanese community's interests before the different Canadian and Quebec governments." We wish him many, many years.

Ten years ago, we welcomed Deacon Michael Shaheen to our Parish as Youth Director. Deacon Michael's father is the late, much-loved Father George Shaheen of Toledo, Ohio, who also served the Montreal community for many years, and worked closely with his brother, Archbishop Michael Shaheen, to unify the Archdiocese into one vibrant whole in the 1970's. Deacon Michael proved himself par excellence in his tenure at St. George, so that Sayedna Alexander Mufarrij ordained him this year a beloved priest to serve our congregation at Father Antony's side. His wife Adma, young son Nathaniel and daughter Tatiana are very dear to our parish and our youth. He is greatly loved and we are so blessed to have his warm and happy presence with us every week. He is a dynamic youth leader, a motivator and friend, and a smile never leaves his face.

A charitable wing of the Fellowship of St. John Divine at St. George, the "Foundation," consists of forward-thinking professional young people who want to make a difference in the quality of health-care in Canada. This worthwhile association of young adults has raised thousands of

dollars to benefit such charities as Alzheimer's, MS, Arthritis, Diabetes, Heart and Stroke. About 500 young Montrealers come out for an evening of comedy and dancing every November.

The Young Men always get together for the preparation and distribution of Christmas Baskets and Easter Baskets to the poor and needy. The Teens participate in a 30-hour fast for Lent, and are hard at work preparing for the Regional Soccer Tournament with all the Ottawa, Upstate New York chapters coming together over Labor Day 2007 for a big kick-off weekend hosted by St. George, Montreal.

The Antiochian Women staged another successful Bake Sale and Bazaar, and hosted the 16th annual Conference sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Women of Montreal. One hundred men and women of all jurisdictions come together each year before Great Lent to ponder great topics of interest. This year, Gayle Woloschak, a Professor in the Department of Radiation Oncology, Northwestern University School of Medicine, and member of SCOPA Social and Contemporary Moral Issues commission, spoke on "Orthodoxy Meets the Biological Revolution (Embryos, Evolution and Environment, Faith and Science, The Interface)." Anyone wanting audio CD's of this stimulating presentation can write to Matushka Masha Schmemmann Tkachuk at mascha@pusinka.com, or Janice Nicola Saba at janice.saba@videotron.ca.

Camp Transfiguration serves the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York August 5-11, "presenting to young people a living experience of the Holy Orthodox Faith in their relationship with God and other campers in an uncluttered natural environment" in the beautiful lake and all the amenities. Through the generosity of the Order of Saint Ignatius, the St. George Legacy Fund, family donations and the Antiochian Women, scholarships are available for campers. The busy social year ends with the 30th annual Father's Day outdoor Liturgy and Picnic, with games and activities for the whole family.

These are some of the exciting and memorable events which define our parish family.

May God Grant Father Antony, Father Michael, Deacon Jean El Murr, the many

many Altar Servers from age 3 to 90, Choirmaster Paul Jabara, and our hard-working team of Church School Teachers led by Magda Naim, many fruitful years to continue their unselfish labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

THE PEOPLE SPEAK

July 12, 2007

Master Bless!

I am so thankful for your missionary hope for the Orthodox Christian faith here in North America.

I recently returned from Toronto, Canada, where I attended the Prison Fellowship International Convocation from July 4 through the 8th. Fr. Duane Pederson, Fr. Stephen Powley and I represented the North American Orthodox Christian Priests serving those in prison.

I am joyful in saying we were also blessed with the presence of Orthodox Christian clergy from Eastern Europe. Many of the missionaries who serve in the prisons overseas have become a beacon of light. There are many now called to fulfill the mission unto those who are in prison.

Our time in Toronto was unique. The Orthodox are respected yet still misunderstood. I believe our presence made it very clear that the Holy Orthodox Church has always carried the sorrow of a broken life and the willingness to help those people find healing.

The Antiochian Archdiocese was the first "jurisdiction" to have a missionary outreach to those who come from various backgrounds of faith and nationality in prison. Thank you for your care to the suffering souls of those in prison.

In His love I write,
Very Rev. Fr. David Ogan
Fellowship of St. Silas
Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry

This Christmas remember St. Nicholas, but don't forget St. Ignatius.



Icons done by the hand of Nick Papas

Join the Order of St. Ignatius.

In December, we remember two great Saints whose lives were dedicated to obeying the directives of Christ. They sold what they had and took care of the poor. The Order of St. Ignatius can help you obey Christ. It is involved in many worthwhile projects and they all build up the body of Christ. Join The Order and resolve to help your archdiocese, your parish, your community and the world. Learn more about The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

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