Is This Just Another New Year? No way!

Somehow I just can’t get my head around the fact that we are starting the year 2010! Almost an entire decade has gone by since we all worried about the world coming to a screeching stop, as computers wouldn’t be able to operate without the number 19 starting the date. In this decade we saw a tsunami, earthquakes, civil wars, invasions and terrorist attacks. People are hungry, children not cared for, workers collecting unemployment and mortgage owners having trouble keeping up. Even debt collectors are frustrated and losing their jobs because they can’t get consumers to pay. People are sick and hospital bills look like telephone numbers.

Where is God in all of this? The answer we hear most often is “by our side.” I find this answer very satisfying, but what I find even more satisfying is recognizing that God is also at the end of all of this, too. He is not only in our history and our present, He is in our future; He is our past, present and future. We were baptized into Him and we share His life. His life is eternal, so we share in His eternity. When we are baptized we put on Christ, we are grafted into His body, we are bathed in His Word, we are fed by His blood.

When I look upon the state of the world, I am overwhelmed. But when I look at the last ten years, and then compare it to the last 2,000 years of human history, I admit that God has seen all of these things before. Can you imagine: God sees our problems and us already from the place of the Second Coming and Final Judgment? Our problems are not new, and our world is not different from all of the generations before us. Some have struggled to know and follow God, others have rebelled and followed themselves instead, in every generation. What can be different for us is our response, now. God sees how everything will turn out – everything the best that can be, given all of our personalities and choices.

In Orthodoxy, we believe the people of God are all called to Christ’s own Royal Priesthood. Each of us is baptized into Christ’s ministry to praise the Father and care for each other. In Christ, we are all called to bring God to man, and man to God. We are all called to minister. In the Church, a few are called to preside as bishops, some to preside when the bishop is not present, some to serve as deacons, and others to constitute the Church by saying the Amen and responding to the leadership of those who preside. We are all essential in constituting the Church, and we all are called to Christ’s own priesthood. There are numerous and various opportunities to express our stewardship as priests within the Church.

I look to the New Year with much excitement and energy. There are sins to repent of, wrongs to right, opportunities to minister, and new people to meet and care for. God calls us from our couches of discontent to positive action. God has ordained us to be Christians. Christianity is the priestly nation of those who are called into Christ’s action. The Holy Spirit, who gives us the energy to serve God through His Son, accomplishes this. By the grace of God, this year could be the year that America comes to Christ, and you could be one of the priests (Christians) who makes this happen. This year could be the year that we understand our priestly vocations and work in harmony with our bishops, presbyters and deacons. This year could be the year that we understand God’s will and His love, and we take better care of our spouses, children, parents and neighbors. Happy New Year!

Archimandrite John Abdalah
On January 6th, Orthodox Christians gather together for the Feast of Theophany. This feast is the third most important feast day in the Orthodox Church (after Pascha and Pentecost). Yes, it’s even more important than Christmas! On this day, we commemorate the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. One question that always arises during this festal season is, “Why was Jesus, the sinless Word of God made flesh, baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist?” There are several theologically correct answers. The hymnography and prayers of the feast state that Jesus’ baptism sanctified the nature of the waters, enlightened all creation, allowed celestials to celebrate and commune with the terrestrial, and made manifest the worship of the Trinity. However, there is another important aspect to this feast. If we look at Scripture and His baptism, we can see the promised fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning His sacrificial death on the Cross. Thus, like the apostles, we can preach “Christ crucified” (I Corinthians 1:23) – the very heart of the Gospel – on the feast of Theophany.
The Word

Jordan River, location of Christ’s Baptism

Icon courtesy of Constantine Youssis
First, let’s take a look at John’s baptism. It was not the same as our baptism today. In the sacrament of baptism, we were cleansed of ancestral sin, illumined, justified, given the seal of the Holy Spirit, and made complete and full members of Christ’s one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. This is baptism’s function in the post-Resurrection and post-Pentecost Church. But John’s baptism was before all this. So, what was it? In Mark 1:4–5 we read,

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and all were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

The gospels also tell us that John the Baptist was the voice crying in the wilderness that prepared the way of the Lord, as foretold in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1–7. At the sound of that voice, the people came to John, confessed their sins, and were baptized, promising to change their ways and to bear fruit worthy of repentance. John’s baptism was a type of Jewish purification ritual in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

So again, the question arises, “If Jesus is God incarnate, and sinless, why does He need to enter into this purification ritual for sinners?” Even John didn’t want to baptize Jesus, but stated that he should be baptized by Jesus. In Matthew 3:15, though, Jesus states,

“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Despite John’s hesitation, Jesus submits to baptism at the hand of John the Baptist. The meaning behind all this is made clear if we turn to the Old Testament.

In Leviticus 16, we read about the Day of Atonement. This religious ceremony involved the sacrifice of several animals, including two goats. We read that Aaron the high priest was to
take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot shall be for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. . . . Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So shall he make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins . . . (Leviticus 16:7–8, 15–16).

From this passage, we learn that the first goat was a sin offering that was sacrificed on behalf of the sinful Israelite people.

A few verses later we read about the second goat, the scapegoat:

And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar; he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:20-22).

This second goat was not killed; hands were laid upon it, sins confessed over it, then the goat was driven into the wilderness. In Old Testament times, banishment into the wilderness meant certain death. The scapegoat symbolized for the Israelite people the removal of sin by the placing of the sin on some other entity so that it became the bearer of sin. In the New Testament, it is Jesus who takes on the roles of both sacrificial animals.

First, Jesus is our scapegoat. At His baptism, the Sinless One took upon Himself, willingly and voluntarily, all of the sins of humanity – past, present, and future. Every sin, every transgression, every fault, and every error of fallen humanity is now laid upon Jesus’ head. In doing this, He fulfills the type seen in the Levitical scapegoat. After being baptized and assuming the burden of humanity’s sins, Jesus exits to the wilderness for forty days. The new scapegoat is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But wait, there’s more!

Second, Jesus is the fulfillment of the sin offering – the other goat from the Day of Atonement. Unlike the scapegoat, Jesus doesn’t die in the wilderness. He goes into the wilderness for forty days to fast and to defeat the temptations of the devil. After that, He returns from the desert and begins His public ministry. Remember, however, that baptism itself involves water. This is important because in the Old Testament water is often a symbol of chaos and death! Thus, in His descent into the waters of the Jordan River at the hands of His cousin, John the Baptist, we see foreshadowed the death of Jesus on the Cross at the hands of his own people. By His crucifixion, Life-Giving Divinity enters into the chaotic waters of death, subdues it, and destroys it. Then, just as Jesus arises from the waters at His baptism, He also arises from the chaotic waters of death at His
Resurrection on the third day.

The good news for us on the feast day of Theophany is this: No longer do we have to offer goats and banish goats year after year which, as it states in Hebrews 10, can never make the offerers perfect. Now, we have a perfect sacrifice – a perfect someone – to lay our sins upon. The old Adam tried to make Eve and the serpent his scapegoats and caused mankind to be cast out of the Garden of Eden. Jesus, the new Adam, comes and takes responsibility for sin and suffers God’s wrath against sin so we don’t have to (Isaiah 53:3–8). By becoming the perfect and sinless scapegoat and sin offering, He takes away sin and the resultant sting of death, and prepares the way to paradise and the unending presence of the light and love of God for those who believe. Let us believers place our sins, our failures, our passions, and our despairs on Jesus so that He can drown them by the virtue of His baptism. On the great and holy feast-day of Theophany, just as those Old Testament priests partook of the flesh of the sin offering, let us, with joy in our hearts, as the priesthood of all believers, partake of the Body and Blood of the crucified Christ who deigned to be baptized in the Jordan River for our salvation. Glory to Jesus Christ!

Fr. Stephen Salaris is pastor of All Saints of North America Antiochian Orthodox Mission.
Elevated

MIKOVICEH, Fr. Theodore, to the rank of Archpriest, by Bishop THOMAS on October 18, 2009.

ORDINATIONS

SCHAEFER, Subdeacon Carl (Kyrill), to the holy diaconate by Bishop MARK, on October 8, 2009, at St. Michael the Archangel Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Deacon Kyrill is attached to St. Michael the Archangel Church.

SAKRAN, Michael, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL, on November 13, 2009, at St. George Church in Houston, Texas. Deacon Michael is in his second year of theological studies at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York.

BABA, Subdeacon Camille Anthony, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL, on November 29, 2009, at St. George Cathedral in Wichita, Kansas. Deacon Anthony is assigned to the Cathedral where he also serves as Youth Director for the parish and for the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.

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Diocese of Charleston and Oakland Deacon’s Retreat
Sayidna THOMAS, Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, Oakland and the Mid-Atlantic, led several deacons of the diocese in retreat August 7–9, 2009, at Saint Ellien’s Church in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. The Rev. Dn. Glenn and Peggy McIntyre and the parish graciously hosted the bishop and the deacons. The retreat began with Little Compline Friday evening. On Saturday, the deacons prayed the services of Matins and the Sixth Hour with Sayidna and, in the evening on that day, Fr. Fred Pfeil of St. Michael’s in Monessen joined the retreat to serve the Vespers.

Interspersed between these services, the deacons and Bishop met for two discussion sessions, one led by His Grace and another led by Dn. Gregory Roeber. Both sessions were in keeping with the theme of the retreat “The Bishop’s Hands,” and emphasized that the deacon is the agent of the bishop who extends the service of the bishop to the parish to which he has been assigned. Deacon Gregory’s paper reviewed both the theological and historical basis of the diaconate in relationship to the bishop and the priests.

During these sessions, the deacons themselves raised many practical questions of how the diaconate should function in all parishes and what the Bishop expects of this ministry. Because of many historical circumstances, both ancient and more recent, Dn. Gregory’s paper documented the fact that most Orthodox Christians in America are not used to having deacons as permanent members of the clergy in their parishes. The deacons responded in discussion that they themselves were responsible for taking some initiative in living out this ministry in partnership with the parish priest and the Faithful. All the retreat participants were urged by Sayidna to help the Faithful to understand not only how deacons serve, but how bishops and priests serve as well, in order that the entire Church might be a servant Church. Sayidna reflected at length upon his own years as a deacon and reminded his deacons that until quite recently, most Orthodox had forgotten the ancient expectation that the deacon should not only serve at the altar, but that serving at the Eucharist naturally flows outward into the parish – the deacon should collaborate with the priest, as a genuine “con-celebrant,” in caring for the needs of the parish, the Faithful and those of potential converts and catechumens. In this regard, Bishop THOMAS emphasized that the deacon should be involved in visiting the sick, taking the Eucharist to those unable to come to Divine Services, and assisting the priest in identifying the sick, the poor, and those in distress. Following Great Vespers on Saturday evening, Sayidna THOMAS and the deacons enjoyed fellowship during an evening dinner at a local restaurant.

On Sunday morning, Bishop THOMAS and the deacons celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with the Faithful of St. Ellien’s and other Pittsburgh area communities, including a Byzantine choir from the Cathedral of Saint George, Oakland, led by Dr. Stephen Esper. Following Divine Liturgy, the beloved of St. Ellien’s hosted a splendid Dormition Fast luncheon in the parish hall. During the luncheon, Mr. Paul Finley, Director of the Antiochian Village Heritage and Learning Center, spoke about the upcoming Saint Thekla’s Pilgrimage and reminded everyone of how the Village and the Pilgrimage provides all Orthodox Christians with the very important opportunity to retreat and withdraw for prayer and spiritual strengthening, so that we an return to the “outside world” rested and ready for our common service and ministry in the Lord. Sayidna and the deacons are hoping to make this retreat a yearly event, and plans are already being laid for a meeting in October, 2010, at another parish location in the diocese.
Antiochian House of Studies/Seminarian Track

Twenty-five seminarians met at the Antiochian Village from August 24–27 for the annual House of Studies. To ensure students in a three-year seminary degree program will be exposed to new material at the House of Studies, the seminarian track is a three-year program also: priestly formation, missions, and pastoral counseling. This year covered pastoral counseling.

Archimandrite John Abdalah (St. George Cathedral, Oakland, Pennsylvania) and the Rev. Fred Pfeil (St. Michael AOC, Monessen, Pennsylvania) led the group, and Dr. Ron Moslener, D. Min., LMFT, assisted with presentations on marriage and family counseling. Mother Alexandra was present at most sessions as well.

The group began on Monday evening with vespers and dinner, after which Fr. Fred welcomed the students and asked each to give a short self-introduction. Then he led a goal-setting discussion and compiled a list of specific questions that the students asked to be addressed before the end of the week.

Tuesday began with breakfast and matins. Fr. John then offered information on various personality types and traits, and how they might manifest themselves in a parish setting. After lunch he continued the presentation with a discussion of several kinds of mood and anxiety disorders, again with examples of how a priest might encounter each in a parish. Many questions from the students kept the dialogue lively and showed a keen interest in learning about this aspect of their future priesthood.

After dinner and vespers the discussions continued with Fr. John presenting “case studies” in which he posed as someone with one of the presented personality, mood or anxiety disorders. The students were encouraged to dialogue with him as they might do if they were the person’s priest; then to diagnose which disorder Fr. John was modeling for the group.

Wednesday began with breakfast and matins. Dr. Moslener then introduced himself and presented a model for understanding marriage in terms of the Holy Trinity. Although he is an ordained Presbyterian minister, he is now attending the House of Studies and showed himself to be well-versed in Orthodox theology. He frequently quoted the Holy Fathers and modern Orthodox scholars. After lunch the group watched a videotaped session of a couple in counseling with Dr. Moslener. Afterwards much discussion ensued regarding what symptoms were observed and how Dr. Moslener framed his questions to gain the most information from the couple as well as their desire to continue the marriage. At Dr. Moselener’s final session Wednesday, he summarized important points and addressed final questions. After dinner and Vespers the group met once more to go over all the goals and questions that were recorded on Monday to ensure that all issues were addressed. Then both Frs. John and Fred conducted an oral critique of this year’s seminarian-track House of Studies, encouraging both positive and negative feedback (that is, what the students found helpful and what they thought needed either to be changed or deleted).

It was generally thought that there should be shorter sessions and/or more frequent breaks; time spent in the chapel going over uniquely Antiochian practices while serving (all students were aware that they were learning specifically Russian or Greek practices depending on which seminary they attended, and that there were differences from their home parishes); in this counseling year more speakers on death and loss, and trauma training; and a priest’s wife present to give a khouria’s perspective to the seminarians. Finally, all agreed that once during the three-year rotation it would be beneficial to have a seminarian family get-together, either during the House of Studies or during the spring semester break.

Thursday began with Orthros and the Divine Liturgy, followed by brunch and farewells all around.
St. Vladimir’s Seminary – Ecological Education Day 2009

On Saturday, October 3, 2009, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York, invited the faithful to its annual Orthodox Education Day, this year entitled, “God’s Green Earth: Ecology and Theology.” The day’s program featured outstanding speakers, exhibits, and workshops regarding the intersection of faith and practice, in relation to the environment.

“This Education Day we want to wed theological vision with practical ways to care for our world,” said the Very Rev. Chad Hatfield, Chancellor and CEO of the seminary. “So, the day will feature everything from the ecological perspectives of ancient church writers, to how to create an ‘earth-friendly’ garden.”

Keynote speaker Dr. Vigen Guroian, an Armenian theologian and professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, will address the topic “Ecological Musings from the Garden,” and an array of other experts will present workshops. In particular, Mr. Chris Nolan, Chief Landscape Architect of Central Park Conservatory, New York City, will discuss the eco-friendly use of land; and Dr. Emily Markides, adjunct faculty at the Peace and Reconciliation Studies Program, University of Maine, and co-pioneer of the Permaculture Garden at Agia Skepi Detoxification Center, Filiani, Cyprus, will share her experience with building sustainable communities. For animal lovers, a monk from New Skete Monastery in Cambridge, New York, Father Christopher, will speak about deepening spiritual consciousness through kinship with animals. The monastery is known globally for its dog-training methods and breeding of German shepherds.

Local environmentally friendly services will host a variety of exhibits, including an exhibit about the planned solar energy installations on the campus of St. Vladimir’s. A special booth for children will offer eco-friendly activities and crafts. High quality garden bulbs, narcissi and daffodil, will be sold, for planting this fall in anticipation of a glorious spring garden. And, once again, in the International Food Tent, seminary students will be offering visitors cuisine from around the world.

Our SVS Press and Bookstore will offer outstanding theological titles for sale, and Dr. Guroian, author of Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening and the Fragrance of God (Eerdmans), and Dr. Elizabeth Theokritoff, author of the latest in the SVS Press Foundations series, Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology, will be available for book-signings. Throughout the day, the Orthodox faithful will gather in community to celebrate not only Divine Liturgy but also an Akathist titled “Glory to God for All Things,” a memorial service, and evening vespers.

The seminary’s annual “Orthodox Education Day” traditionally is a campus-wide homecoming for alumni, friends, supporters, and the public. St. Vladimir’s Seminary, founded in 1938 and at home in the Crestwood section of Yonkers since 1961, is an accredited graduate theological school with an international student body and a world-renowned reputation for theological inquiry and study. This year’s campus theme celebrates perspectives on care for the world as uniquely and deeply associated with the worship and faith of the Orthodox Christian Church.

The exhibitions and workshops are open to the public from noon to 5 p.m. without charge. For more information, travel directions, and to view the program for the day, visit the seminary’s Web site at www.svots.edu. And please download the day’s program to share with parishioners and friends.

Deborah Belonick, Advancement Information Officer
St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary
914-961-8313 ext. 363
deborah@svots.edu
www.svots.edu
THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCITION OF THE LORD

Every male of you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. A child who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised ... and my covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant (Genesis, 17:10-13).
When our forefather in faith Abraham was ninety-nine years of age, the eternal Son and Word of God came to him and made covenant with him. He commanded that, as the defining “sign” of that covenant, Abraham and his seed be circumcised. Throughout succeeding centuries, Israel dutifully kept this Law and even took it as a cause for boasting (Galatians 6:14).  

It was to fulfill this divine commandment that our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ was circumcised on the eighth day after His birth according to the flesh from His pure and ever-virgin Mother Mary. This event receives but passing notice in the Gospel:

> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (Luke 2:21).

Yet, laden with great significance, Christ’s circumcision proved to be both the fulfillment of God’s commandment in the Law and a prophetic sign of future events.

The Savior’s circumcision was the occasion of the first shedding of His precious blood. The Cross overshadowed the Lord Jesus even while He lay in a crib by swaddling bands bound. The knife which cut the Lord’s flesh on that day foreshadowed the centurion’s spear which would pierce His side, releasing the saving torrent, the blood and water (John 19:34). That torrent drowned the Law’s type and shadow and gave birth to the font. Circumcision prefigured the saving stream of holy baptism through which we Christians enter the new and eternal covenant of salvation as St. Paul proclaimed:

> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12)

In circumcision a blade wielded by the hand of man cut away flesh; in baptism the blade of the Holy Spirit cuts away sin. The Spirit-blade cuts deep, root out the sin of our forefather. In the blood of Christ’s Passion sin is drowned together with death’s might and Hades (Hosea 13:14; I Corinthians 15:55). Through the water from His side a fertile seed of immortal life and incorruptibility is firmly planted in the soul and flesh of each one who issues from the font. The metal blade of circumcision marked the flesh of Jewish males; the Spirit-blade of baptism marks the soul and body of each and every Christian with the “Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Before this new and mighty “sign,” the cherubim with fiery sword who guard lost Paradise, which of old was in Eden (Genesis 3:25), give way that the children of the new Covenant may, like the Good Thief (Luke 23:43), pass within to rest until the final consummation of God’s eternal plan.

> Of old God in the Law commanded Israel: “circumcise your hardheartedness, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deuteronomy 10:16).

Now we who have undergone the very real surgery of baptism, must circumcise our hearts as well. St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria (+444), says that we, the faithful, who have been established in grace through holy baptism, must cut away and mortify the tumultuous risings of carnal pleasures and passions by the sharp surgery of
faith and by ascetic labors; not cutting the body, but purifying the heart, and being circumcised in the Spirit, and not in the letter [according to the letter of Mosaic Law]; whose praise, as the divine Paul testifies (Romans 2:29), needs not the sentence of any human tribunal, but depends upon the decree from above.” 2

Thus we learn the significance of Christ the Savior’s eighth-day circumcision, that

“Name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9) was given:

1. His fulfillment of the Mosaic law;
2. the foreshadowing of His saving Passion and of our participation therein through holy baptism;
3. the taking up of the cross and (Luke 9:23), the daily circumcision of our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit through ascetic effort.

The all-good God was not ashamed to be circumcised with the circumcision of the flesh, but provided Himself as an example and pattern for all, for their salvation; for the Creator of the Law fulfilled the prescriptions of the Law and the predictions of the Prophets concerning Himself. O Lord, who holdest all things in the palm of Thy hand and was wrapped in swaddling-clothes, glory to Thee (from aposticha of the feast).

Father Daniel Griffith

The unworthy servant of Christ, the priest Daniel Griffith, Pastor, St. Michael’s Antiochian Orthodox Church, Geneva.

1. Although circumcision was practiced by a number of cultures of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world, at the beginning of the Christian era it was closely identified with the Jewish people. In the New Testament, the word “the Circumcision” without further qualification meant the Jewish people, as contrasted with “the Uncircumcision,” the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-8; Ephesians 2:11; Colossians 4:11).
Teen SOYO on Purity, Virginity, and Chastity

SOYO expands its Education Month offerings. For the past several years North American Council (NAC) Teen SOYO has asked teens to focus on the Sacred Gift of Life in its education discussions during the month of January, especially on the Sunday closest to the Roe v. Wade U.S. Supreme Court decision. [Editor: To hear the original “Jane Roe,” Norma McCorvey, now speaking out against the decision, go to www.virtuemedia.org/norma.htm.] While we want teens to continue to discuss the Sacred Gift of Life, this year, in light of the results of the 2008 Archdiocese Survey, Teen SOYO has chosen to expand its educational witness to include the Orthodox Church’s teaching on Purity, Virginity, and Chastity (PVC) as preparation for marriage and as a way of life for those who choose monasticism.

Teen SOYO members have recognized that what they do now in their lives will affect their future marriages and choices in life. SOYO members have chosen to educate and equip themselves and their peers to make better choices. NAC Teen SOYO has prepared a discussion packet for all Orthodox teens and has placed it online at www.teenSOYO.org. We encourage all teens, and parents of pre-teens and teens, to take the time to download this packet, read the material, and discuss it within the family. Teen SOYO Chapters are also encouraged to hold discussions on this topic using these materials.

The Archdiocese Survey data suggests that parents, clergy, youth workers and church school teachers need to expand their discussions with teens concerning dating; the Orthodox understanding of virginity; what we expect of our young people in marriage; and what they should hope for in a future spouse and in themselves. We encourage parents, teens and the parish to engage in this discussion. While we will place a packet of information on the Web for parents and teens, we encourage parents, youth workers and teens to do further reading. Some recommended readings include


Youth Worker Education Fund

Each January, SOYO members help raise funds for the NAC SOYO Youth Worker Endowment Fund. The Fund was established by Teen SOYO to fulfill a dream of our teens that parishes would each have well-educated youth workers who could help engage teens in the life of the Church, help them with their daily struggles, and keep teens in the Church. Four years ago NAC SOYO set the goal for this endowment fund at $250,000. To date the teens have raised $155,000 towards this goal.

Our teens stated that, while they cannot educate the youth workers themselves, they could raise the funds to help make this education possible. We have partnered with the Antiochian House of Studies to develop a Youth Ministry track within the St. Stephen’s Program, a track that consists of three years of distance learning, three one-week residency sessions over the three years, and a thesis project, leading to a Master’s Degree from the Balamand University. More information is available at www.antiochian.org/studies.
You can help make this dream of our teens become possible:

- **Donate to the SOYO Youth Worker Fund**

  Make a credit-card donation online at [www.teenSOYO.org](http://www.teenSOYO.org) (go to the “Donate to Youth Ministry” button and select “SOYO Youth Worker Fund” from the drop-down list.

  Mail your check to the Department of Youth Ministry, P.O. Box 389, Westwood, Massachusetts 02090. Please make checks payable to “NAC SOYO Youth Worker Fund.”

Support your parish efforts to raise funds for this ministry.

Encourage your parish youth workers, advisors, and youth director to enroll in the Youth Ministry track of the St. Stephen’s Program. Consider sponsoring a student in part or whole. One year’s cost is approximately $2,000, including the residency program.

NAC Teen SOYO gave a gift to OYO (Orthodox Youth Outreach) in order to FOCUS North America ([www.focusna.org](http://www.focusna.org)) on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 2009. This was also an effort to make OYO pan-Orthodox and to expand its outreach to the poor and needy across North America.

Fr. Joseph Purpura wrote in the Youth Department press release of August 6, 2009, “It is with great joy and with the blessing of his Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP, that the North American Council of Teen SOYO gifts their Orthodox Youth Outreach Program (OYO) to FOCUS North America, so that this effort may grow and be shared by all Orthodox Youth.”

FOCUS North America wrote in its press release on the same day, “FOCUS North America is excited to announce the extension of its domestic outreach to the poor by receiving the highly acclaimed Orthodox Youth Outreach (OYO) program from the Antiochian Archdiocese Department of Youth Ministry and Teen SOYO. Added to FOCUS North America’s diverse ongoing operations and partner ministries, the OYO program strengthens its domestic ministry to the homeless and hopeless by involving youth in urban service-learning opportunities and social action leadership training.”

We are pleased to see that OYO, now also called Y.E.S. (Youth Equipped to Serve) continues to grow and expand. We encourage teens from across North America to support this outreach effort and to participate in it. You may reach the OYO or Y.E.S. Web site at [www.yesnorthamerica.org](http://www.yesnorthamerica.org) or [www.OrthodoxYouthOutreach.net](http://www.OrthodoxYouthOutreach.net).

**Alcohol Abuse and Teens**

The Department of Youth Ministry, with the blessing of his Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP, reported to the Fall Archdiocese Board Meeting that the Youth Department was starting to develop an extensive program to address the issues of alcohol abuse amongst teens. The department is working on a program to focus on prevention and intervention. The 2008 Teen Archdiocese Survey, as well as other surveys conducted across the country, point to alcohol abuse as one of the greatest challenges confronting our teens today. In its continuing effort to help teens make good and healthy choices, the department has started the early phase of defining the scope and needs of this program. If you wish to help with this effort, you may contact Fr. Joseph Purpura ([FrJoseph@orthodoxyouth.com](mailto:FrJoseph@orthodoxyouth.com)). The department is in need of expertise in the prevention and treatment of alcohol abuse, as well as funding for this effort.

**Special Olympics**

NAC Teen SOYO expresses its gratitude to the faithful members of the Antiochian Archdiocese across North America who so generously donated to SOYO’s 2009 Special Olympics Appeal this past October. Parish donations are listed at [www.teenSOYO.org](http://www.teenSOYO.org).
Special Olympic SOYO Coach applications are now available online at www.antiochian.org/sites/antiochian.org/files/2010_SO_Application. pdf. Teens are encouraged to apply early, as the application deadline is April 1. The 2010 SOYO – PASO Special Olympics Sports Camp will take place August 13–22, 2010, at the Antiochian Village Camp.

Scholarships

Scholarship applications and Information are available online at www.antiochian.org/scholarships. Listed scholarships include the Francis Maria Scholarship, as well as scholarships offered through the Fellowship of St. John the Divine and other Orthodox sources.

2010 Bible Bowl Resource Site

The Department of Youth Ministry announces that the 2010 Bible Bowl Study site located at www.orthodoxyouth.org/CE is completed and ready for use. All Bible Bowl participants are encouraged to take advantage of this extensive resource site for the Letters of James, 1–2 Peter, and 1–3 John. The site offers quizzes and study guides in both PDF and Mp3 versions. More information on the festivals may be found at www.antiochian.org/festivals.

Oratorical Festival 2010

We encourage every Antiochian Orthodox Parish to prepare its teens to participate in the 2010 Diocesan Parish Life Conference Oratorical Festival. The 2010 Oratorical Topic, “The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness, the whole world and those who dwell therein,” reminds us that the world, all that is natural to the world, and specifically ourselves, were created by and belong to God. This timely topic is designed to engage teens and parishes in a discussion of the Orthodox perspective on the world as created by God and our responsibility to care for this gift.

Resources to prepare for the 2010 Oratorical Festival are online at www.antiochian.org/node/18958. Included on this page are the Oratorical Rules as well as a recommended reading list for participants. Recommended reading on this topic includes:

- “An Orthodox Christian Ecology and Theology of Creation” (PDF) by Rev. Terence Baz, Syracuse, New York, available on the Oratorical Web page;
- Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology, by Elizabeth Theokritoff
- Land and Covenant, by Paul Nadim Tarazi, OC-ABS Press, 2009;
- The first chapter of the Book of Genesis;
- Chapters 23–25 of Psalms, as numbered in the Orthodox Study Bible;
- Writings on the subject by the Fathers of the Church; the Scriptures; and other Orthodox writings on this subject.

Check out www.antiochian.org/node/18958 for additional recommendations.

Teens from the Eastern Dioceses SOYO helping at the Tree-House

During SOYO Leadership Training this past summer, Gale Malone advised NAC Teen SOYO on how to be a good philanthropist: “In order to be a philanthropist,” she said, “a person must give their three T’s: time, treasure, and talent.” She then proceeded to tell us about a very important organization – The Tree-house. The Tree-house
was established to help women who decide not to have an abortion, despite their unfortunate situations.

The Tree-house offers assistance to women in various ways. Eligible mothers receive necessities for their new-borns, such as diapers, formula and clothing. Also, educational programs and classes are offered for new and expectant mothers, focusing on parenting, nutrition, hygiene, life-skills development, and spiritual growth. For each video, worksheet, or homework assignment completed after attending a workshop, the mother earns Baby Bucks. These Baby Bucks are coupons which can be used at The Tree-house Thrift Store. This fosters responsibility while ensuring the well-being of mother and child.

The Eastern Dioceses of SOYO (a combination of the Diocese of New York – Washington D.C. and the Diocese of Charleston and Oakland) learned about this amazing organization and immediately decided to get involved. We felt that this would be a great follow up to our involvement in promoting the sacredness of the gift of life. It can be easy to tell women not to have abortions, but as Orthodox Christians it is also our responsibility to take the next step to help those who have decided against abortion during difficult times. We have to show them how important life is and how beautiful the gift of motherhood really is.

To get involved with The Tree-house, the Eastern Dioceses of SOYO asked their local chapters to collect baby supplies during the weeks preceding our Fall Gathering at the Antiochian Village (the weekend of November 13–15). We thought that this very honorable organization deserved our attention; to ensure that our teens got involved we added a little incentive: a discount on their annual dues. It was originally said that the chapter that collected the most supplies would receive 25 percent off their annual dues, while the second chapter would receive 15 percent off, and the third, 10 percent. When the Executive Board entered the meeting room on November 14 at the Antiochian Village, however, we were ecstatic to see an array of baby supplies, including, diapers, clothes, and formula brought to us by our chapters. So we decided, to show them our appreciation, to give each chapter that participated 20 percent off their dues. After our meeting, the supplies were sorted and boxed. In total we shipped twelve boxes of supplies to The Tree-house organization.

We were living out Christ’s command that we love our neighbor. At that moment, the teens of the Eastern Diocese were giving their time, treasure, and talent to help better the lives of their neighbors. Our teens are taking the necessary steps towards living out their faith and learning what it means to be Orthodox Christians. It has been said that we may be the only Christ a person will ever see; I can say confidently that if an onlooker stood in that room as the baby supplies were being boxed, he would understand the will of God. The love for each other and the love for the project at hand were astounding.

We would like to thank all the Eastern Diocese teens and their advisors for attending our amazing Fall Gathering where we served God and each other through “Worship, Witness, Service and Fellowship.” We would like to convey our deepest thanks to all the chapters that participated in this rewarding service, all the teens who helped sort and box the articles, and the Antiochian Village Conference Center for the boxes used and the assistance with shipping.

If you are interested in helping The Tree-house, visit their Web site at www.wichitatreehouse.com or contact Ms. Gale Malone at dgjmalone@cox.net.

“We cannot thank ya’ll enough as our shelves were close to empty” – The Tree-house, A Project of Orthodox Christian Ministries, Inc.

Mary Sayegh, Vice President, and Haneen Sakkini, President, DOWNY DCOMA.
“The Bucket List” Seniors’ Retreat

The Fall colors at the Antiochian Village provided a beautiful background for our Bucket List Seniors’ Retreat, October 15–17, at which we viewed the film *The Bucket List*.

After one of Tim’s great lunches, we gathered in the Ajar Amphitheater to watch the movie. In the opening scenes we meet Jack Nicholson and quickly learn that he is a powerful man with so much money that he can do whatever he wants. He does just that – whatever he wants. He owns hospitals and has decreed that every room shall accommodate two beds and no less! When he finds himself in one of his hospitals he also finds, unhappily, a black man occupying the bed next to him.

After a strained beginning, the men get to know each other and each is told his time is limited to a matter of months. This common knowledge becomes the basis for what Nicholson calls his “bucket list”: all the things he wants to do before he dies. He persuades Morgan Freeman to make himself such a list. For Nicholson, jumping out of an airplane, kissing the world’s most beautiful woman, climbing the world’s highest mountain, and – well, you get the idea. For Freeman, it’s more spiritual. Father Donald Shadid began the discussion after the movie by asking for a summary of the desires of each man. We discussed what we had seen and heard which led us into the spiritual aspect from Freeman’s point of view.

Following our session, we had a fabulous evening at an open house at the Heritage Museum. The exhibit was prepared in excellent taste and the guests were impressed with the textiles and artifacts on display.

The next morning our day began with breakfast, followed by a session on “Your Spiritual Life in Your Later Years.” Father John Abdalah guided us through the aspects of our service within our own parish. He asked for suggestions for our own spiritual bucket list. What did we plan for our spiritual life as seniors? What have we done for ourselves and our parish? What have we accomplished and what could we yet do to benefit our parish and ourselves?

The next session dealt with “Spiritual Leadership in Your Parish Community.” Among the topics raised were volunteering, setting an example for others, and serving as greeters, parish council members, secretary (and the importance of secret in secretary), church school teachers, and so forth.

In the final hours of each man’s life, Morgan Freeman was with his family – wife, children and grandchildren around the dinner table, holding hands in prayer. Nicholson, on the other hand, was planning on an evening with two “ladies” and trying to open a frozen dinner without success.

Morgan Freeman died. Nicholson gave the eulogy. Freeman was cremated and buried on the top of the mountain which he had hoped to climb but never did. Nicholson died soon after and was also cremated and buried next to Freeman. There is a lesson to be learned from the film and Father Don and Father John taught by thought-provoking questions and discussion.

It was a wonderful retreat. All present had been active in serving the parishes to which they belonged. But additionally, what spiritual leadership role did we, and could we, plan for our parish and for the community in which we live that would enhance our senior years?

God willing, we will have another retreat for seniors in 2010, and you who are seniors will be there to share it.

Helping Orthodox in the Philippines

St. Gregory the Great parish in Washington, D.C., has responded to a need in a unique way. When Metropolitan Paul (Saliba) of Australia and New Zealand welcomed into the Church a large number of converts from various Roman Catholic and Evangelical Protestant backgrounds in the Philippines, the parish worked to provide a welcoming environment and support for the new members. The parish organized events and activities to help the newcomers feel connected and included within the community. This effort reflects the commitment of St. Gregory the Great parish to promote unity and understanding among different faith traditions.
in May of 2008, an appeal was made for help to provide resources for the new Orthodox Christians. Fr. Pascualito Yitzhak Monsanto, the new Vicar for the Philippine churches, began seeking all the needed materials for parish life for the 400 families from very poor areas who had now embraced holy Orthodoxy.

Jennifer Caldwell, a member of St. Gregory’s, offered to use her home-schooling supplies to mount and laminate small paper icons for each of the new converts. Using pictures of icons primarily from calendar pages, Christmas cards, and church bulletins, St. Gregory’s parishioners have now prepared more than 1,000 icons of Orthodox saints and feasts. Josephine-Catherine Carandang, another member of St. Gregory who is Filipino, is organizing efforts to provide these spiritual resources for the churches. Vestments and Orthodox Study Bibles have been sent, but much more is needed, including children’s books, more Bibles and service books, and funds to pay for shipping items.

For more information or to respond to this need, please contact Josephine-Catherine Carandang, or Fr. Nicholas Alford, pastor of St. Gregory, at 1443 Euclid St. NW, Washington, D.C. 10009.

90 Years of Serving God and the Church

The Ladies Society of St. George Orthodox Church, Norwood, Massachusetts Anniversary Celebration, Saturday, September 19, 2009

As immigrants who grew up in parts of Syria’s Homs Valley and in Lebanon, excited by the possibilities entailed in coming to America, our founding ladies knew what to do – and they got it done! They worked tirelessly, with determination, without complaint, and careless of recognition. They did it for the good of the church. They were saintly examples of true Orthodox Christian women. Now, more than 90 years later, the Ladies Society of St. George, Norwood, is filled with women from diverse cultures sharing the same mission and a common destiny.

The Society began on May 26, 1918, when Esther Deeb, a 16-year-old visionary and first-born of Syrian heritage in Norwood, started the first generation of ladies on their journey. The ladies formed their committees and elected their officers. She recorded the official minutes. On that day the ladies committed themselves to building a church.

These foremothers settled in South Norwood and lived within eight blocks of each other; the church would become the center of daily life for them. They lived as one large family, helping each other to learn and grow. Esther made their transition to American life easier. She served as their interpreter (since they did not yet know English) and later helped them obtain U.S. citizenship.

Esther encouraged each and every lady to serve as president and to serve in any capacity that would suit their abilities. The ladies’ major role was supporting their husbands and fathers in the building, not of one church only, but of two: the first building was established in 1921, but burned to the ground in 1933. The current building was built and dedicated a year later.

This period 1918 to 1933 encompassed the post-war era and the Great Depression, and one can imagine how challenging it must have been to provide the basics of life, let alone to build two churches. They did this, however, as it was done throughout the Archdiocese – with sacrifice and dedication to God.

In 1930, the Girls Club was formed for single women sixteen years and older; when these young ladies married they were welcomed into the Ladies Society. In later years both clubs merged into one, bringing together women of all ages who continued the activities of their mothers and grandmothers.

In the beginning, they held their meetings in members’ homes, discussing ways in which they could raise funds to start building a church in Norwood. Those funds were the
nickels and dimes they could spare, plus the annual dues of twenty-five cents. The work did not stop after the church was built. As in other communities, the ladies cooked endlessly to raise money, and did much of the manual work themselves. The Girls Club raised $500 to buy the large and beautiful chandelier that still hangs from the center of the dome, and the Ladies Society cleaned its hundreds of crystal pieces along with the rest of the church.

During World War II many families had husbands, sons, fathers or brothers fighting overseas. As their contribution, the ladies formed a Red Cross chapter. They gathered to roll bandages for the war effort every week, donated blood and held bond drives (raising $12,500 in one instance). They diligently wrote letters to their servicemen, and even sent birthday cakes when they could, as well as food and toiletry packages. Our “boys” acknowledged their gratitude in their letters.

When the War ended, the ladies focused their energy on raising funds to support the church, while reaching out in fellowship and chairing social activities – theatrical shows, dances, dinners, picnics, haflas and street festivals, including a community Christmas card.

Our ladies are continuing today to help our servicemen. In May 2005, one of our ladies and a U.S. Army officer met during a one-hour plane ride in Italy. That chance meeting developed into an e-mail friendship. A year later, a church project sponsored by our ladies brought cheer to this serviceman and his troops during their first tour in Afghanistan.

To encourage and comfort those ladies who were sick or homebound, the Ladies Society formed the “Sunshine Committee,” sending cards to those in hospital or in nursing homes and delivering plants at Christmas and on Mother’s Day. This was followed by the “TLC (Tender Loving Care) Committee,” which visits the sick and brings handmade baskets filled with cookies, candies and get-well cards designed by the children of the parish.

In the early 1970s the ladies took an active role in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America (AOCW-NA), an organization established 36 years ago through the vision of His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP. Its purpose is to foster sisterhood among the women, and service together in prayer and in charitable works. How proud our ladies were when one of their own was called to serve as president in the New England region.

The Ladies Society has carried out many outreach projects, including the Children’s Relief Fund, Project Mexico, the Norwood Food Pantry, the St. Nicholas Tree project – and women’s shelters here at home. Many gave time and energy throughout these decades, and we cannot name them all, but we would be remiss not to acknowledge Khouriyyee Afefee Abraham (who came from Syria in October, 1953) and Khouriyyee Erin Kimmett (who came from Kansas in May, 1995). Just as our foremothers took up the banner from the first Christian women, our ladies of the 21st century continue to carry the banner forward.

Linda M. Thomas lives in Norwood with her family and is a lifelong parishioner of St. George, Norwood.

Tournament and Retreat

The gymnasium at St. Elijah Church in Oklahoma City was bouncing with activity as more than 150 teens and advisers gathered for the third annual DOWAMA SOYO Basketball Tournament. SOYO members traveled from El Paso, Houston, Denver, Wichita, Omaha and everywhere in between to attend this wonderful event and retreat.

Fr. Michael Nasser served as the retreat speaker for the weekend. He talked with the teens about “Maintaining Faith in Chaos.” His words of wisdom enlightened everyone on the way we can focus our lives on Christ while living in a world with many distractions.

When Fr. Michael wasn’t teaching, things were heating up in the gym, as all the churches went head to head in four-on-four basketball games. Twelve teams participated in the tournament, but only one could walk away with the trophy. After intense battles in the final four and championship games, St. George, Houston, took away their second consecutive title.
Congratulations to the teens from Houston and everyone who played in the tournament. It’s time to start practicing for next year!

Erin Learned
Youth Director
St. Elijah Orthodox Church
Oklahoma City, OK

Learning about Eritrean Orthodox Culture

St. Luke Antiochian Orthodox Church – Erie, CO

Our church family includes several families from Eritrea, a country in Northeast Africa. In order to raise money for our building fund, these families hosted a cultural night, which included a traditional dinner, cultural presentation and dancing.

During Vespers prior to dinner, we sang Ezgio-Meharena Kristos, the phonetic version of “Lord Have Mercy” in Ge’ez, which is the liturgical language of the Eritrean Church.

Immediately following Vespers we gathered in the church hall, which was decorated with pictures, baskets and traditional items from Eritrea. The men, women and children all wore traditional white clothing. The menu included enjera, a type of flat sponge-like bread, eaten with zigni, a lamb stew, and alecha, a vegetable stew. During dinner in the packed hall, we listened to Eritrean music and watched videos.

After dinner, we watched a presentation about the ancient Eritrean Orthodox Church. The highlight was a children’s choir singing in the church, and a video clip from a celebration where the people were dancing and playing large drums. Young and old alike took to the dance floor to participate in traditional dance. Others watched the dancing while sipping small but potent cups of Eritrean coffee.

Everyone enjoyed the evening. In addition to raising money for our building fund, we raised our awareness of the Eritrean people. May God continue to bless our community.
This timeline is ideal for lectures, church schools, visitors, evangelism, etc.

This banner, “Time-Line of the Christian Church,” was designed by the V. Rev. Fr. Constantine Nasr for his resource book for Mission and Evangelism. The chart shows the time-line of the Church, from the Nativity of Christ to the present day. It highlights all of the "denominations" of Christianity, and when they split from the Original Church.

Fr. Constantine was encouraged to produce this wonderful tool as a 3½ x 6½-foot vinyl poster, a durable, double-stitched, hemmed and grommeted labor of love.

This time-line is ideal for lectures, Church Schools, visitors, evangelism, and so forth. Non-Orthodox inquirers will be able to see where their church deviated from the Original and Orthodox Church.

* All proceeds go to benefit students and to help build the chapel in the priestly house in Taybeh, Palestine.

“The latest and greatest tool for evangelism!”

Please send a check for $200 (each, plus S&H) to Theosis Publishing Co., 14709 Brasswood Parkway, Edmond, OK 73013.

For more information, please contact St. Elijah Antiochian Orthodox Church by e-mailing revnasr@yahoo.com or calling (405) 503-6277.
Your Eminence, Reverend Clergy, fellow Orthodox Christians, Christ is in our midst. Our journey in life, as our Orthodox church instructs us, cannot be aimless. As human beings are composed of body, soul, and spirit, the gravitational forces of good and evil during our voyage pull us in all possible directions. Our souls, not having an intellect of their own, can easily attach themselves to life-creating matters or life-destroying matters. As long as the soul is attached to “something,” it is satisfied. Our job, with the help of the Church and our spiritual fathers, is to be attached in our souls to life-creating matters through bearing fruit. Once the soul is headed in the correct direction, that is, on the path of deification, the body cannot help but follow. Accordingly, how do we proceed to do this?

Bearing fruit does not take place on its own without direction and hard work. The role models in our lives, through their own fruit-bearing, directly or indirectly affect our own fruit-bearing. Through their example, we learn how to blossom with fruit. In my case, the influential people in my life have been my mother and my uncle. My mother is a quiet leader who helps in the Ladies Society at my parish, and my uncle is chairman of the parish council.

My uncle’s leadership within the parish, especially in the building of the new parish building, has been a great influence on me, helping me to flesh out my notion of “fruit.” I have learned that, like a priest, I need to see a group of people to be much more than the sum of their parts. The momentous effort of building the church has had an immense impact on my family, the church family, and especially the young people. Through this combined exertion of energy an essential goal was achieved: a place of worship was built.

Galatians 5:22 says, “The spiritual person is kind. He never practices cruelty in any of its forms, but is always gentle in his relations with others.” According to the Apostle Paul, kindness is a “fruit of the Spirit.” I have learned this trait through the kindness of my mother. She has always been there for me when I was a child, helping me to be ready for school and packing my lunch willingly and with love, among countless other acts of kindness. When I was just a little boy, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was in a hospital bed for days at a time and I didn’t really understand what was happening to her. What she taught me then was that kindness is contagious. Because she cared for me so much, when she was away I learned how to care for others. On an entirely other dimension of kindness, my mother taught the women in my church her secret recipes so that they could cook for church fund-raisers. This, too, had an impact on me, as well as on parishioners.

Kindness and leadership are fruits that work together to make each other stronger. The greatest leaders, the ones who served for the longest times and were loved by their people, have been the ones who were kind. The fruit of kindness proceeds from true Christian love toward others. The blessed Apostle Matthew quoted our Lord in his Gospel (5:43-44) as follows: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” These short verses instill in us the idea of perfect love. They correct the notion that love is simply an emotion. Love here is a verb, not a noun. It requires action and deliberate steps of serving others. Kindness is one of the ways we can influence others and minister to them so that they too may bear fruit.
in their own right. The only way to bear fruit is to be alive in Christ. To be alive in Christ is to be a branch in the living tree itself, which is Christ. For the same sap that flows in the tree streams in the branches.

We must discern, however, the difference between being nice and being kind. On the one hand, “niceness” is acting as if we are concerned; it can be dishonest and it is useless in the eyes of God. Kindness, on the other hand, is much deeper, more elemental. Kindness is loving behavior, marked by a mild disposition, pleasantness, tenderness and concern for others. Being kind can be difficult to do, but it actually shows how much a person cares for others. Kindness does not mean overlooking people’s sins; it means forgiving them. A kind person will correct others, if need be, and his very kindness will be shown by his care and concern for the well-being of his fellow creature ‘for whom Christ died.’"

Acquiring kindness, as a Christian characteristic, is crucial for our spiritual development, as it helps us be more genuine. Being kind in my daily life as a teen has encouraged others to be kind. Loving our enemies might teach them how to love. The green grape of kindness, easily confused with the red and purple grapes of niceness, is a small but important fruit, full of the many essentials of a true Christian life. Like a grape, we retrieve the fruit from the vines that our mentors grow, until we learn to grow it ourselves.

True wealth starts spiritually. It is earned by hard work. There is no spiritual lottery that one can win, no religious inheritance that just drops into one’s lap. It starts with one’s own determination and devotion. The Apostle Paul says in 2nd Timothy 2:6, “The hardworking farmer must be the first to partake of the crops.” Hence, rewards are reaped by the rich but the poor still have much to learn. There are two types of spiritually poor people: those who do not go to church or believe in Christ, and those who attend church and might pray but do not follow Christ’s commandments. After all, to be truly one with God, one must go to church persistently, because it is more than just a place to pray. The church is the dwelling place of God and where His Kingdom is manifested on earth. It is no wonder that the priest starts the Divine Liturgy with “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!” This statement signifies that the faithful have entered at that specific moment, with the priest, into God’s Kingdom.

The Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy refers to the spiritually poor, for whom we must be concerned with kindness. They are less fortunate than us in the sense that they are not as close to God. It behooves us to care for them so that they increase spiritually. St. Isaac the Syrian states that “he who helps his neighbor will be granted God’s help.” It is such a profound, yet simple statement. If it is applied on a daily basis to help the poor, we enrich them. For, in one instance, the poor according to elder Paisios the Athonite are those who “live in the world of their pride” and, therefore, are “filled with illusions and they are in danger.” If we strove to help them in a discrete and non-threatening way, on a daily basis, we would be ministering to them. As we helped them, we would bear more fruit and consequently bring ourselves closer to God.

It is all about theosis or, in English, deification, which is reaching the level of perfection that Christ asks of us: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The process of doing so starts with directing our soul, with the help of our spiritual father, so that we attach ourselves to the life-creating matter, God Himself. This is a life-time development, accomplished through persistence of prayer, perseverance in acquiring virtues, insistence on bearing fruit, resolve in participating in church activities and services, and avowal to help others. It is all about commitment! Once we are on our way in this spiritual journey to help others and ourselves, God Himself will strengthen our
momentum and help us reach the next level.

There is a litmus test that we can use to ask ourselves if we are becoming spiritually richer, from God’s point of view. It is a self-analysis that inquires about the conformity of one’s life to God’s commandments. For example, the first commandment raises such questions as, “Have I been thankful for God’s blessing?” The sixth commandment likewise leads one to ask, “Have I defamed others who needed help, or failed to stand up for those unjustly treated?” This test helps us learn how much, in our souls, we are connected to life-creating things such as the Church and God, or life-destroying things such as greed and hatred. Being spiritually rich allows us to go back to the natural life of Adam and Eve before their fall, which God has intended. Such self-examination brings to our consciousness how we are progressing and accordingly lets us improve and attain a cleaner and less sinful soul, which draws us closer to that ultimate goal of deification.

In conclusion, because Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for their disobedience to God, we suffer the consequences of their fall. As such, our souls are exposed to the continuing choices of sin, versus virtue and bearing fruit. Our choice should be virtue and bearing fruit so that, in our souls we may be attached to God through helping the spiritually poor. For I ask you, if we, the Orthodox Christians, who have the knowledge about God and faith in Him, do not put these concepts to work in order to help others draw closer to God, who will?
IOCC Delivers Emergency Supplies to Typhoon-Battered Philippines

Baltimore, Md. (IOCC) — International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is coordinating the delivery of hygiene kits to help over 3,000 survivors of Typhoons Ketsana and Parma, which struck the Philippines in late September. The subsequent floods and mudslides killed hundreds and an estimated 2.5 million people are either homeless or in need of emergency aid.

This latest effort by IOCC is part of its response to a series of natural disasters – multiple typhoons, earthquakes and a tsunami – that recently hit Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Whole communities have been destroyed and thousands killed or injured.

Heart to Heart International (HHI), a medical humanitarian organization, is providing the hygiene kits and shipping them through their partnership with FedEx. Lutheran World Relief (LWR) will receive the kits in the Philippines and distribute them in the Northern Luzon area, giving priority to families headed by women.

IOCC is also working through the Orthodox Church in the hard-hit province of Rizal to deliver emergency supplies to victims. IOCC has provided enough food, clothing and medicines to assist nearly 500 survivors through the relief efforts of the Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Manila.

You can help the victims of disasters around the world, like the Asia Pacific disasters, by making a financial gift to the IOCC International Emergency Response Fund, which will provide immediate relief as well as long-term support through the provision of emergency aid, recovery assistance and other support. To make a gift, please visit www.iocc.org, call toll-free 1-877-803-I0CC (4622), or mail a check or money order payable to IOCC, PO. Box 630225, Baltimore, Md. 21263-0225.

IOCC, founded in 1992 as the official humanitarian aid agency of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), has implemented over $300 million in relief and development programs in 33 countries around the world.

The First OCMC Mission Team to Zimbabwe

Red dust is kicked up from the ground, highlighting the stark beauty of beiges and browns in the fields and the leafless trees. The rains won’t begin for at least another month – you can taste the dust coating your throat. A group of men are singing in jubilation and stomping the dust with vigor. They keep the beat with their hands alone; there are no drums in sight. The tiny village of Hurungwe has little to offer – tattered clothing, bare feet, and hungry bellies are in abundance – but today their spirits are full because today their Bishop is visiting with a Mission Team from the United States and Canada. Today, the foundation stone of their new church will be put into place; it will go under where the altar will

The Orthodox World
be built. Emotions are high for everyone. The Team members assist in the service and watch their names being lowered into the foundation with the founders of this African church. As they clap and dance along to the songs of the Shona women, they know that a part of them will remain in Africa forever.

The first OCMC Mission Team to Zimbabwe experienced many unforgettable events like this as we traveled alongside His Eminence, Metropolitan GEORGE, of Zimbabwe. We participated in something happening throughout the country, and we experienced a reciprocal blessing between the team members and the local church (comprised of the Greek, Shona, and Ndebele people groups). Our brothers and sisters in Christ showed us love and taught us about hospitality.

They are hungry for instruction about the Orthodox Church and way of life. We found much joy during the teaching times as we shared our own knowledge and experience and tried to answer their many questions. They also bared their souls to us, asking very personal questions before and after sessions, as well as during sessions for specific gender and age-related matters. After two weeks of clinging to us like Velcro, a few small children must now be wondering, “Where did the white women go?”

There is so much hunger in Zimbabwe. The people are hungry for food and other supplies. Only a year ago, grocery store shelves were empty and there was no gas. Banks were restricting how much a person could withdraw each day; even if you had money in the bank, you could not access it when you needed it. Inflation had spiraled out of control. A year ago, one U.S. dollar equaled 13 trillion Zim Dollars. At the beginning of 2009, U.S. dollars and South African rands replaced the next-to-worthless Zim dollars.

Today, things have improved dramatically. Bread is available in the cities. Gas is available at most stations (though one has to check chalk boards to see that they announce “petrol – yes, diesel – yes,” if you want to be sure). Knick-knacks are available at the markets. As visitors, we had plenty to eat. There are still shortages, however. In Harare, a city of six million people, there has been no public water source for a year and a half (early 2008). Each building or residence has to pump water from the water table. Power cuts occur without warning, affecting everything from traffic signals to the water pumps. One night, the Metropolis was without electricity and water from 6:30 p.m. until 9:00 a.m. the next morning. Despite the frustrations, the people are joyful. They know how much the situation has improved. They are survivors.

The communities lack school and church supplies, for which we received many requests. Money is needed to carry out the work of the Church. Another project of the Metropolis is the School Fee Program. All children must pay school fees to go to school (for both public and private schools). Most parents cannot afford to pay the public school fees.

The villages are still struggling. They do not receive many
of the food items and school supplies that are now available in the cities. In Chitate, a hamlet outside of the village of Mrehwa, a group of women have formed a peanut butter-making co-operative. They grow the peanuts, harvest them, shell them, clean them, and grind them into peanut butter. They sell their organic product (chunky or creamy!) in the village. These hard-working women are determined to help provide for their families.

The Team was blessed to spend time with the villagers in order to witness the peanut butter project and the spirit of the people. What love and what joy! When we arrived, the women were singing, dancing, and clapping in procession to meet us. We had never met them before, but each woman embraced every team member with such excitement, energy, and for so long that it appeared as though they were greeting long-lost relatives. They honored us like dignitaries and happily showed off the village. We were also able to try grinding the peanuts and tasting the result. It tasted just like the organic peanut butter I buy at home! The women cooked a traditional Zimbabwean meal for us, including meat (something that is always rare in villages). We blessed them with food, toys, school supplies, and candy which had been sent in crates from Greece. His Eminence also blessed them by buying the entire stock of peanut butter (which he then distributed as gifts). The entire village was blessed that day . . . and so were we.

At the end of the day, it was hard to leave because we had grown so close to the people we met. We connected in different ways with brothers and sisters in Christ of all colors, both genders, and of varying ages. As we shared our stories and the people shared theirs, we realized how much we have in common, even when our day-to-day lives are so different. It was hard to say good-bye to our remarkable brothers and sisters in Christ, even after so short a time. But we know that they will be praying for us, our churches, and the next Team that will come to serve them. Already, I am wondering whether I will be a part of that Team.

When God asks, “Who shall I send to Zimbabwe?” will you answer, “Here I am, Lord. Send me”?'

Amanda Eve Wigglesworth

Pan-Orthodox Conference on Care for Severely Challenged Patients

The 2009 Annual Conference of the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology, and Religion (OCAMPR) focused its November 6-7 conference in Brookline, Massachusetts, on “Care for the Severely Challenged Patient.” OCAMPR, endorsed by the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), is an inter-jurisdictional network of Orthodox persons in the helping and healing professions.

The conference was prefaced by an open General Board Meeting on Friday, November 6, at 1:30 pm at Holy Cross. The conference proper began at 7 p.m. Friday evening at the Holy Cross Seminary campus.

Conference presentations
reviewed the needs of patients with chronic illnesses and severe and persisting trauma, from a pastoral, medical, and psychotherapeutic perspective. Speakers included Deacon Nathanael Symeonides, Dr. Aaron Haney, Dr. Michael Christakis, and Presbytera Maryann Tonnias.

Over the two days, speakers offered talks on various dimensions of Care for the Severely Challenged Patient, focusing on medicine, psychology, and theology, and they discussed a sample case. Group discussions invited reflections, questions, and comments from conferees. Resources on caregivers’ practical concerns from the perspective of medicine, nursing, hospice care, ethics, theology, law, counseling, chaplaincy, and clinical pastoral education were available at the conference, and the Holy Cross bookstore also offered resources.

Fr. Nathanael Symeonides is deacon to His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. He is a native of Thessaloniki, Greece, and holds degrees from Hellenic College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, and Boston University. He is now completing a Master’s Degree in Public Health at Columbia University. Fr. Symeonides also serves as an adjunct instructor at St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York. He has published several articles, principally on subjects pertaining to bioethics.

Dr. Aaron Haney, the son of a Wesleyan minister, was born and raised in Southern Indiana. At the outset of the first Gulf War he withdrew from university and joined the Army. He served as an infantryman for two years in Korea. In 1996 he was chrismated in the Orthodox Church in Bloomington, Indiana. Soon thereafter he started medical school at Indiana University on an Army scholarship. He finished his residency in psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2006, and then spent three years at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, as a Medical Detachment Commander and clinician with a deployment to Iraq. He now lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife Jennifer and son Elias. He works as a Consultation-Liaison Psychiatrist at Riverside Methodist Hospital.

Dr. Michael Christakis is a general internist with a practice at the Worcester (Massachusetts) VA Clinic, which is the largest community-based outpatient clinic of the Boston VA Healthcare System. He teaches medical students and residents, is a Fellow in the American College of Physicians, went to medical school in Greece, and trained at Roger Williams Hospital of the Brown University internal medicine training program. His practice includes care for veterans from the various American wars, including an increasingly large number of veterans from the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Dr. Christakis has been in the VA for fifteen years, serving at various VA facilities in New England and in his current post in Worcester for seven years.

Presbytera Maryann Tonnias is a native of Schenectady/Niskayuna, New York. She received her BSN from Russell Sage in Troy, New York, and her MSN from the MGH Institute of Health Professions in Boston. She has worked as a nurse in rehabilitation, public health, and clinical practice and now works as a hospital educator at the VA in Bedford, Massachusetts. She converted to Orthodoxy in 1986 at St. Sophia in Albany, New York. She now lives in Watertown, Massachusetts, with her husband, Fr. Demetrios Tonnias, and their four children.

The Orthodox Christian Tradition takes a holistic perspective on one’s life in Christ. The pan-Orthodox OCAMPR cultivates interdisciplinary dialogue and programs to realize that holistic approach in serving others. Members seek to understand and experience the relationship between theology and the healing arts and sciences, and serve better in the light of Christ’s truth and the Church’s wisdom.

For more than twenty years, OCAMPR has promoted Christian fellowship among professionals in medicine, nursing, mental health, psychology, ethics, theology, Church ministry, chaplaincy, parish nursing, social services, prison and community ministries.

OCAMPR hopes to continue contributing in faith-filled, collaborative ways to the spiritual sustenance and growth of those who are dedicated to addressing the needs of our hurting world.
Kirk Stevens uses everything he has – even the homemade tattoos on his arms – to gain credibility with his kindergarten-to-12th-grade students in New Orleans, Louisiana. Stevens is the academic director of the after-school program at Desire Street Ministries, a school and community outreach program founded in 1995 to help boys who typically fall through the cracks of the public school system in New Orleans’ Upper Ninth Ward. “They’re so street-wise, they have this attitude of ‘if you haven’t been there, then I don’t want to hear about it,’” says Stevens.

Stevens has been there. The 59-year-old former oil company accounting assistant who left his career to answer the call of “black men helping black men,” was raised by a single mother in the notorious Desire housing project during the 1950s and 60s. At its height, the project housed 14,000 individuals and was so infested with drugs, gangs, and crime that “you thought twice about venturing across the street to the supermarket,” recalls Stevens.

Hurricane Katrina devastated Desire Street in 2005 along with the rest of the Upper Ninth Ward, which was sandwiched between the two major levees that collapsed. The neighborhood is slowly coming back, with small convenience stores, some brightly painted churches, and the occasional repaired home interrupting rows and rows of rotting, deserted buildings.

Desire Street Ministries sits at the end of Luisa Street in a nondescript building with a large gymnasium. The school’s mission is to transform the community by training young black males to be leaders. IOCC recently provided one million dollars worth of audio/visual equipment and books for their new library, the only one in the neighborhood. While funding for the storm-battered Gulf Coast has tended to focus on emergency relief, IOCC is also supporting key local partners like Desire Street that focus on education and community development.

A typical Desire student is being raised by a single mother who is looking for a safe place for her sons while she is at work. About sixty percent are living with a relative because one or both parents are incarcerated or struggling with a drug addiction. There are some extreme cases of boys raising themselves. For many, Desire Street is a refuge, a chance to get the positive affirmation they lack at home and to escape the temptations of the street.

Twenty-year-old Josh is a graduate of Desire Street Academy and fits the typical profile. This summer, he is helping a new group of elementary-age boys to register for the summer program. When he was their age, Josh and his twin brother used Desire Street’s program to escape an unhappy home life. “There were days when we didn’t eat or hadn’t bathed,” says Josh, whose parents struggled with drug addiction. Josh attended the Academy for junior high and high school, including the years when the school had to relocate to Baton Rouge following Katrina.

Today, he is a sophomore at South Carolina State University majoring in Social Work. His brother is attending a college in Tennessee. “The best thing I can say about Desire Street is that it turns boys into men,” says Josh, who credits Stevens for his success. “He was there from the time I first walked through the door until the day that I walked across the stage for my diploma.”

Stevens says that getting to these boys early is the key, which is why the after-school program is so vital. “We have kids in this area with the same abilities, capabilities, and dreams as any kid in the suburbs. It’s just like a plant – if it doesn’t get the proper sunlight and watering, it won’t last very long,” he says.

The goal is to have 350 students in the day school, and to add a grade every year through high school. Like other schools in New Orleans, whose public system is ranked among the poorest in the nation, Desire needs more support, more volunteers, and more men like Mr. Stevens. The list is long, but so is the list of boys waiting to get in.
in more than 33 countries around the world.

If you would like to help IOCC’s U.S. program support projects like Desire Street, call IOCC’s donation hotline toll-free at 1-877-803-4622, make a gift on-line at www.iocc.org, or mail a check or money order payable to “IOCC” (with “US Program” in the memo line) to IOCC, PO. Box 630225, Baltimore, MD 21263-0225.

Dear Rev. Clergy, and Brother and Sisters in Christ,

“You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

Are you looking for ways to serve God, participate in works of mercy, and extend your hand to those in need? If you’re thinking, “Yes, yes, yes!” then we have an opportunity for you!

At Project Mexico we believe that Orthodox Christians truly are the light of the world. We are committed to shining our light into the communities and hearts of the Mexican people in the Rosarito/Tijuana area, and into the lives of orphaned teen-aged boys. Since 1988, Project Mexico has been involving young people in the alleviation of suffering by building homes for Mexico’s poor. Hundreds of homes have been built for needy families with the help of nearly ten thousand volunteers.

In 1996 our outreach expanded with the opening of St. Innocent Orthodox Orphanage in Tijuana. This facility provides a home for teenaged boys who have been put out of other orphanages or otherwise would live on the streets.

Project Mexico has built over 180 homes for impoverished families, changing the lives of one family at a time. Three years ago we expanded our program by introducing Orthodox Basic Training (OBT), in which several hundred Orthodox Christians from all over the country gathered together to answer Christ’s call to serve the poor. Divided into small groups, they go out into the community to build a home for a Mexican family in need. Everyone stays in tents at St. Innocent Orphanage. These weeks include fellowship, daily prayers, evening speakers, and a chance to speak with clergy, monastics, and people currently working in the mission field.

The OBT experience is
summed up by this testimonial: “For me, the time at OBT is a profound and personal validation of the love expressed through mission work . . . . OBT offers a beautiful and sincere introduction to this through acts of mercy, fasting, worship, prayer, study, and fellowship” – Anthony Callas, St. Paul's (GOC), Irvine, California.

With the success of last year’s home-building season, we’re expanding again and can now accommodate 300 volunteers in each week of OBT, June 22–28 and July 6–12. There is still space available. So, if you have been thinking that there must be some way for you to shine your light, perhaps this is your calling! To sign up for a week, or if you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at mfranck@projectmexico.org.

In Christ,
Madi Franck

September 24, 2009
Dear Editor,

As I reviewed past issues of The WORD, I came across an article in the May 2009 issue which I found quite interesting. I refer to the article entitled “Orthodoxy and the Unborn Child,” by Dr. Christopher Humphrey. This scholarly work I found to be quite enlightening, as it covers a difficult subject in a logical and objective manner. In light of the basic message of this article, I am left with a serious question for myself and my fellow Orthodox Christians. The question is raised by the article in general, but more specifically from the statement in the article which reads, “It is a scandal that there are politicians, so called Orthodox, who are pro-choice.” I believe this statement speaks for itself, and my question falls directly from that thought: Is it not equally scandalous for Orthodox Christians to support and vote for candidates who support abortion? Are we not equally accountable in endorsing such a candidate? When I think of a particular situation, such as a partially born child being put to death in the name of pro-choice, I ask myself how there can be any justification for such treatment of one of God’s most helpless creatures. In light of this, to repeat my above thought, can we in good conscience endorse and vote for any candidates of this persuasion?

Again, thank you for this timely article.

Yours in Christ,
William Nimee
bnimee@comcast.net
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