Antiochian Women’s Prayer

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

DIAKONIA is the newsletter of the North American Board of the Antiochian Women, an organization of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and is published quarterly.

PUBLICATION GUIDELINES:

Deadlines
• Please submit your articles by the first of the month
  prior to the month of publication so we can ensure
  they are included.

To submit articles, e-mail as a word attachment to:
antiochianwomenna@gmail.com

Submission Details
• Please include your name and the phone number
  where you can be contacted for questions.

Content
• All articles must be of interest to or regarding NAB,
  Diocesan or local Antiochian Women.
• All articles may be edited for length and clarity.

In each issue we will highlight one of the Dioceses. We encourage everyone, however, to submit news and articles from all Antiochian parishes of North America for publication in every issue so we may keep in touch with each other.

What is DIAKONIA?
The word DIAKONIA is a Greek word meaning Service, usually pertaining to service in the Church. The purpose of the Antiochian Women’s organization is primarily spirituality and humanitarian service. In the words of our Founder, Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory, it is “Theology in Action.”

To read the DIAKONIA online, or for general information regarding the Antiochian Women, please go to the Antiochian Women website at:
http://www.antiochian.org/women

To read past issues of DIAKONIA, go to:

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Antiochian Women North America
November 10, 2017

Beloved Sisters in Christ,

With profound joy and immense gratitude, I greet you in the Name of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ!

This winter issue of Diakonia is dedicated to introducing the Antiochian Women of the Dioceses of Charleston & Oakland and New York & Washington, D.C., collectively known as the Antiochian Women of the East. I was struck by the use of the acronym AWE for this joint ministry. What a beautiful use of the English word awe.

Awe is defined as having reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder. Unfortunately, our wider culture has cheapened the word somewhat through its use of “awesome” as a superlative for anything good, from a sandwich to an amusement park ride to a movie. So forgive me if I do not write that I believe the Antiochian Women are awesome.

I will write that as the Metropolitan of this God-protected Archdiocese, I stand in awe of our Antiochian Women. I stand in awe of the loving sacrifices you make as mothers, god-mothers, aunts, sisters, and friends. I stand in awe of the vital ministries you fulfill in the life of our Archdiocese as leaders and members of our parish councils, choirs, educational programs, and social ministries. And I stand in awe of the good work done collectively by all of our Antiochian Women fellowships throughout the Archdiocese.

I will also call us to be renewed in our awe of the great mystery of the taking on of our flesh by the Son and Word of God in the womb of the Ever-Virgin Mary. During the busyess of the season, we often forget to reflect on the renewal of our human race that came through the trusting and faithful “yes” of the young and humble virgin gave in response to the awe-inspiring vision of the Archangel Gabriel, who himself stood in awe of her who is full of grace!

Be assured of my love and prayers for all of you as you continue your vital ministries in the life of the Church. Once again, I call on you to lead us in inspiring all of our faithful to find and live their own vocations in Christ. I believe in you, and I trust you in this sacred work.

Wishing you and your loved ones a pure and holy Advent fast and a joyous and blessed feast of the Nativity, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

Metropolitan Joseph

†JOSPEH
Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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A Message from His Grace, Bishop THOMAS
Diocesan Bishop

Dear Antiochian Women:
Christ is in our Midst! He is and Always Shall Be!

It is my distinct honor to greet you in the Lord Jesus Christ! The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America, founded in 1973 by His Eminence Metropolitan Philip of Thrice Blessed Memory, have served as faithful witnesses to the Gospel and worked tirelessly “serving Christ through serving others.”

The history of salvation as recorded in the Holy Scriptures is filled with examples of our Thrice Holy God acting with intention and particularity in the course of human history. In the Book of Genesis, God created man and woman separately and distinctly. They were created to complement each other. This is God’s design and is significant because it is intentional. God created male and female, man and woman, with a purpose. Sadly, this notion has been lost in a culture that seeks to blur the lines between man and woman. As Orthodox Christians, we rejoice in this difference for in it is to be worked out the plan of our salvation over the long course of history.

Just as Eve initiated estrangement from the Lord God, it was another woman, the holy Theotokos, who would initiate our salvation. The role of women in the divine economy becomes even clearer when we meditate upon the Holy Myrrhbearers. In his commentary on the Myrrhbearing Women, Saint John Chrysostom writes, “The first voice of the resurrection is ‘rejoice’, and before all, He meets the women, and to them the Lord said: ‘Go quickly, tell my Disciples that I have risen from the grave, and I go before you to Galilee, there you will see me.’ He met [womankind], among whom had sin been multiplied, and greatly multiplied grace. O, the wisdom of the Lord's deed! He did not send to the Disciples an angel, nor did He go Himself to them, but sent a woman. And not a simple woman, but a faithful woman, who was herself soldier-like. He sent them to the Disciples to bring joy, but also to censure. Joy, for He had risen from the dead and was "free among the dead", but censure, for the Disciples, though they were men, out of fear hid, while the women out of boldness, joyously evangelized the resurrection.”

You, our beloved Antiochian Women, who work tirelessly out of love for Christ and His Church are the modern Myrrhbearers. No act of love accompanied with faith in Christ will go unnoticed or unrewarded in the Kingdom.

The Myrrhbearers’ reward is intimated in the Forty Gospel Homilies of Saint Gregory the Dialogist, “You have heard, dearly beloved, that holy women who had followed the Lord came to the sepulcher with spices. They had loved Him when He was alive, and they showed Him their eager tenderheartedness even when He was dead. Their deed points to something that must be done in our holy Church. Thus as we hear of what they did, we must also think of our responsibility to imitate them. We too, who believe in Him Who died, approach His sepulcher with spices if we are strengthened with the sweet smell of the virtues, and if we seek the Lord with a reputation for good works. And the women who came with spices saw angels, since those who advance toward God through their holy desires, accompanied by the sweet smell of the virtues, behold the citizens from on high.”

May God bless you abundantly as you minister in the name of Christ and His holy Church!
Yours in Christ,
+His Grace, Bishop THOMAS
Meet Diocesan Spiritual Advisor,

V. Rev. Fr. Donald E. Shadid

Fr. Don was born & raised in Peoria, IL, being Baptized & Chrismated at All Saints Greek Orthodox Church. He has been active in Church all of his life (Altar Server, Church School, Jr. Choir & GOYA, etc.). Fr. Don graduated from Illinois State University (B.Sc.) and while there, he started an Orthodox Campus Ministry, under the guidance of Fr. Mark Stevens (OCA) and also worked as a “Campus Ministry Associate.” Then, with the Blessings of His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP, he began his M.Div. Studies at St. Vladimir’s Seminary (SVS) in the Fall of 1981.

The next summer found Fr. Don at the Antiochian Village as a Seminarian, Cabin Counselor & Nature/Ecology Director. It was there that Janet Abdalah (sister of His Grace, Bishop JOHN) was assigned to Fr. Don’s Nature Hikes for “crowd control,” and as they say, “the rest is history” (they are honored to say that they are Antiochian Village Marriage #3)!

After graduation from SVS in May 1984, Fr. Don worked full-time at the Antiochian Village as Asst. Camp Director & Program Director at the newly constructed Heritage & Learning Center, under the mentorship of the late Fr. John Namie (Memory Eternal!).

Fr. Don was ordained to the Holy Priesthood in April 1986 and in June of that year was assigned to the Pastorate at St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church in Johnstown, PA, where he serves until this day. Fr. Don & Kh. Janet have been blessed with two wonderful sons; Christopher (Holy Cross Seminary – M.Div. & Univ. of Pittsburgh – MSW) who is one of the Assistant Directors at the Antiochian Village Camp; and Stephen (Duquesne Univ., Pharm.D.) who is a Pharmacist and is active at St. George Cathedral in Pittsburgh.

In addition to his ministry with the AWE and the 113 yr. old Parish Family of Johnstown, Fr. Don has been involved in numerous ministries & organizations (e.g. Spiritual Advisor – E.R. Fellowship of St. John the Divine; Treasurer – St. Sophia Orthodox Christian Academy [a Pan-Orthodox Pre & Elementary School housed at his parish], Treasurer – local Orthodox Clergy Assn., Asst. Scoutmaster – BSA & Venture Scouts, Board Member & Secretary – local Professional Christian Counseling Ministry & OCF Regional Chaplain). Fr. Don has also earned his Doctor of Ministry Degree through the Antiochian House of Studies and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Fr. Don loves his family, his doggies, the outdoors, movies, bagpipes, classic country music, water-skiing, and talking about the Orthodox Christian Faith (he used to dream about discussing Orthodoxy with Elvis, Johnny Cash & Mel Gibson!) He is so very thankful to God for all of his Blessings and all of his Crosses too! Nish-qor Allah (Thanks be to God)!

Why fast before the Nativity?

*We fast before the Great Feast of the Nativity in order to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Our Lord’s birth. As in the case of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast is one of preparation, during which we focus on the coming of the Savior by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. By fasting, we “shift our focus” from ourselves to others, spending less time worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on in order to use our time in increased prayer and caring for the poor.*
A Message from Rula Osama Khoury
Diocesan Antiochian Women President

Born in Taybeh, Palestine during the Intifada, Rula grew up in a time of war. As a result, she grew close to her faith like many other suffering Palestinians in her all-Christian village. She attended Taybeh Latin Christian High School and graduated with Honors. Soon after she married her late husband, Osama Khoury and moved to America. She found herself in a new country and went to college and received two separate degrees. Rula has three children; Michael, a second year medical student at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, is 23 years old. Gabriel, who is 21 years old, will begin law school at American University in Washington, DC. Her youngest Amal, age 19, is a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh and is studying Psychology.

After her husband passed away, Rula moved from New York to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to start the next chapter in her life. Rula now works as a supervisor in Cambria Suites in Pittsburgh and owns her own travel agency. She plans tours to the Holy Land and other countries. Rula and her kids live their father's legacy every day and continue to make him proud with each life accomplishment. Rula is the president of the Antiochian Women of St. George Orthodox Cathedral in Pittsburgh, as well as a member of the Parish Council.

During her time in New York, Rula and her family were very active at St. James Orthodox Church in Hyde Park, NY. Her husband, one of the main founders of St, James, wanted to complete his father’s dream (Fr. Michael Khoury) to open an Arabic speaking church. With help from God, the mission became a large church community. Rula and her husband have a special love for St. James Church, watching the church grow from its first baptism to establishing a Sunday School, to opening a new hall in Osama’s name. Osama was the mobilization of the church and Rula plans to continue her late husband's love for the church every day.

Rula and her children love the outdoors. They frequently hike, camp, and love their weekend trips to get ice cream. Rula and her family love visiting new countries and plan to visit Central America this winter.

Her Patron Saint is St. George. She grew up hearing her mom and grandma always asking St. George (Mar Jeries) for help and blessings. She loves the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, her kids are named after them.

Her favorite verse from the Bible is “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13. Her husband spent his whole life serving God and his friends and this verse is special to her.

Her favorite book to read is *Wounded by Love* by Saint Porphyrios.

Rula would like to express her thanks for the opportunity to serve God and his children in her new position of President of the Antiochian Women of the East. She is very excited and can't wait to meet everyone and work alongside them while doing the Lord's work!
Meet the Diocesan Officers and Coordinators

Angela Saliby, Vice President

Angela was born in Buffalo, New York to Wadih and Nanette Hanna (Memory Eternal), two hard working Lebanese immigrants who came to the US to build a better life and future for themselves and eventually their children. She graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Business Management and Accounting from the State University of New York at Buffalo. While attending undergraduate studies, she managed the family ice cream business and worked at US Airways, and continued to do so after graduating.

She met and married her husband Walid, 22 years ago, and together they are blessed with three wonderful children; Sophia (20), Maria (18), and Nicholas (16). All three have been campers at Antiochian Village. Angela has volunteered at Antiochian Village and both of her daughters, Sophia and Marie, have served as counselors. This year Nicholas had the privilege to serve as a coach for Special Olympics at the Village. After moving to Ashburn, Virginia, eighteen years ago, Angela decided to stay home to raise her family. She returned to the work force in 2009 as a school bus driver for Loudoun County Public Schools, and she is also a self-employed Wellness Advocate.

Angela is a member of St George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Washington DC, where she serves as an active member of the Ladies Myrrh-Bearing Society and Teen SOYO Advisor.

Angela grew up in the Maronite faith. After marrying her husband Walid she started learning about Orthodoxy and later baptized their children in the Orthodox Church. After visiting Antiochian Village and learning more about the Orthodox faith, Angela started to embrace Orthodoxy. She was finally charismated four years ago and grows stronger in her faith each day.

Angela loves to read, cook, garden, bike, yoga, travel and the theatre.

She is thankful for the opportunity to serve the Antiochian Women of the East and looks forward to doing our Lord's work together.

Patron Saint is St Sophia

Favorite Bible Verse:
"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; In all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths."
Proverbs 3:5-6

Favorite religious reading: Psalms
Officer and Coordinators (continued from previous page)

**Khouria Loukia Dixon, Recording Secretary**

Khouria Loukia Dixon, the daughter of immigrants from the island of Cyprus, grew up in Charleston, WV, where she attended St. John Greek Orthodox Church and learned much about Byzantine chanting from her father. She is the wife of the Very Rev. Fr. John Dixon (married: 1989); they both served Holy Spirit Antiochian Orthodox, in Huntington, WV, in their first 12 years of marriage as parishioners and then as a priest family from 2001 to the present. Along with their children, Basil, John, and Christianna, they often formed the chanters and choir in the parish. Now as adults, Basil and Subdeacon John live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Christianna lives with her husband, Jaredt, in Grand Rapids, Michigan where they continue to use their singing talents as choir members and chanters in their parishes.

Khouria Loukia is also the choir director, chanter, and a member of the Antiochian Women of St. Sophia at Holy Spirit Church. She loves to adorn the church with flowers, especially during feast days and Holy Week. Khouria Loukia also enjoys walking, Greek dancing, and growing flowers, herbs, and house plants.

Since 2003, Khouria Loukia, a Master's level speech-language pathologist since 1988, currently serves as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Disorders at Marshall University, in Huntington WV. Teaching others to serve those with communication disorders as well as serving Holy Spirit Church at the local level and the Antiochian Women of the East at a diocesan level aligns with her love for helping others. She looks forward to working as the Recording secretary for the Antiochian Women of the East for the next two years, as the women of the diocese strive to do God's work.

**Patron Saint:** Saint Luke the Evangelist, whose memory is celebrated on October 18

**Favorite Bible Verse:** “I will sing unto the Lord throughout my life, I will chant to my God for as long as I have my being.” Ps. 103

**Favorite Spiritual Book:** *A Spiritual Psalter or Reflections on God*, excerpted by Bishop Theophan the Recluse from the works of our Holy Father Ephraim the Syrian.

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*Today is born of the Virgin Him Who holdeth all creation in the hollow of His hand. He Whose essence is untouchable is wrapped in swaddling clothes as a babe. The God Who from of old established the heavens lieth in a manger.*
Khouria Rima Zafaran, Treasurer

I grew up in Halba, Akkar, North of Lebanon. I served at my church as a chanter. After my high school graduation, I decided to study theology at the University of Balamand, (1989) which was the most blessed five years of my life.

I am the wife of the Very Rev. Fr. Meletios Zafaran (married: 1996). Our parish is St George Church in New Kensington, Pennsylvania. I am the mother of four children: Mark (second year of college), Maria (junior at high school), Marina (6th grade), and Michael (4th grade).

I work as a cashier at an elementary public school cafeteria. I teach Sunday School for the middle school (6th through 8th graders).

I am a member of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the ladies society at St George Church. I like to serve and help with all our organizations, especially when we prepare for a festival or any other church projects. I worked as Treasurer for the Antiochian Women of the East for the past two years and am now beginning my second term hoping to serve God’s church with love and honesty.

Patron Saint:
St Barbara The great Martyr, whose memory is celebrated on December 4th.

Favorite Bible Verse:
Jesus said to Her:”I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die…” John 11:25_26

Favorite spiritual book:
“Life sayings of St. John Chrysostom “ This book is translated from Greek to Arabic. These teachings offer important life advice for everyone from St. John Chrysostom.

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St. Ephraim the Syrian on the Nativity

Pure is the present night, in which the Pure One appeared, Who came to purify us! Let our hearing be pure, and the sight of our eyes chaste, and the feeling of the heart holy, and the speech of the mouth sincere!

The present night is the night of reconciliation; therefore, let no one be wroth against his brother and offend him!

This night gave peace to the whole world, and so, let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Meek One; let no one be cruel!

This is the night of the Humble One; let no one be proud!

Now is the day of joy; let us not take revenge for offences! Now is the day of good will; let us not be harsh. On this day of tranquility, let us not become agitated by anger!

Today God came unto sinners; let not the righteous exalt himself over sinners!

Today the Most Rich One became poor for our sake; let the rich man invite the poor to his table!

Today we received a gift which we did not ask for; let us bestow alms to those who cry out to us and beg!

The present day has opened the door of heaven to our prayers; let us also open our door to those who ask of us forgiveness!

Today the Godhead placed upon Himself the seal of humanity, and humanity has been adorned with the seal of the Godhead!
Hope Sabbagh, Humanitarian

A social worker for children, humanitarian missionary and advocate, and a co-chairwoman of her Annual Heritage Festival, Hope Sabbagh continues to strive in her everyday life to balance her faith and work. She centers her life around her church and family. In her home parish of Allentown, PA and as a daughter of the parish priest, Fr. Anthony G Sabbagh, she continuously stays active within the organizations of teen SOYO, Sunday School, St. John the Divine (YAM), and humanitarian functions. She continues her education and attends Marywood University working to earn her Masters of Social Work. Hope went on a missionary trip to Greece where she assisted the influx of refugee’s trying to find safe passage. She is an aunt to 9 beautiful nieces and nephews and even part of a bigger family; the third largest Syrian community in the nation. She is a bright, determined, and passionate young lady who hopes to be more involved in the Archdioceses in the near future, to continue to be the branch of the vine of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to touch others through the testament of faith.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

Favorite Saint: Saint Raphael of Brooklyn.


Pamela Hennawi, Membership Coordinator

Pamela Hennawi was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She moved to Baltimore where she met and married George Hennawi from Damascus, Syria. They have three young children and attend St. Mary’s Antiochian Church in Hunt Valley, Maryland. Pamela is involved in her parish Ladies Society, Bible School and Vacation Church school. She coordinates an annual fundraiser for IOCC and Syrian relief.

Pamela is a Registered Dietitian with a focus on Childhood and Adolescent weight management. She is currently working and serving on the board of a nonprofit organization that provides nutrition and fitness education to Baltimore City school children.

Pamela feels blessed to serving the Antiochian Women of the East as the Membership Coordinator. She looks forward to connecting with many you in this role.

Patron Saint: Saint Pelagia, whose memory is celebrated October 8th

Favorite Bible Verse: John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
Maria Koropsak, Religious Coordinator

I was born and raised Roman Catholic. October 1992, my dear mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She succumbed to the cancer Aug. 6, 1993 – the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord. On Aug. 31, 1993, three weeks after her death, I encountered, during our vacation in Wildwood, NJ a woman who shared the Lord with me and that day my life changed. I started going to church and I had a hunger for God as I never had before. I reached out to a friend of mine who was an evangelical Christian. She brought me to a Bible teaching church where I started to hear “expository teaching” on the word of God. This teaching lead me to love God’s Holy Scriptures.

My passion for God’s word continued to grow. I would visit many churches during my faith journey, Baptist, Methodist, Assemblies of God and many others. I was searching for something, but I wasn’t sure at the time what it was. It seemed to me there had to be more to worshipping God than singing some songs and hearing an inspirational sermon.

Alex, my eldest child, went to Philadelphia Biblical University, where he studied Biblical theology. Alex was going through his own journey, while studying at PBU—he was seeking the apostolic church. The church that Christ had established. What did that church look like? What did the worship of God in that early church look like? In his search, he came across the Church Fathers, a discovery that would change his own path and ultimately mine.

Alex would come home and share traditions, God’s covenants and the early church. We would talk theology, something I was ignorant of, and the ‘sacraments’, which as an evangelical, sounded very ritualistic; but I would later come to understand that they are means by which God’s grace is poured out on us.

There was an incredible yearning in my heart for God that no Bible study, women’s retreat, or inspirational message, could ever satisfy. In 2010, I came across the verses in John 6:48-58 which I had read so many times before since 1993.

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

I came to the realization that the “emptiness” I felt was the need for the Holy Eucharist.

That search took me back to the Roman Catholic Church for three years, but while in the church I found that my heart was still not “home”. There were doctrines that didn’t line up with the Bible. My son Alex had become an Orthodox Christian in December 2009 and I had been at his Chrismation and had visited his church in Mechanicsburg and other Orthodox churches since 2009. I came to love the worship and traditions of the Orthodox Church. I especially loved the reverence. I found that the Bible led me to the Orthodox Church, its liturgies and its traditions and the church led me right back to the Bible. There was one church in particular that I was drawn to; it was a Western Rite Orthodox Church. It closely resembled the liturgy of the Roman Catholic but there was a purity in the liturgy that pulled me in. Every time I attended a liturgy, I saw people going up to receive the Holy Eucharist. I yearned in my heart to receive the body and blood of our Lord. There was a purity of worship in the Orthodox Church that took me to heaven every time I attended a liturgy. The incense, the chanting, the prayers were all directed to the “right worship” of God. When I heard the prayers Father would recite before ascending the altar, there was a reverence that took me back to the Old Testament and it was Aaron approaching and entering into the Holy of Holies. Only now, with the pure and holy and perfect sacrifice—our blessed Lord.
Maria Koropsak, Religious Coordinator (continued)
On June 24, 2014 – the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, after much prayer and discernment I was received as a catechumen into this wonderful church - St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church in Thurmont, MD. It was truly fitting that I would be received as a catechumen on the patronal feast day of my church.

My patron saint: the Woman at the Well, St. Photini. She had always been an inspiration to me. I always pondered her life. She wasn’t looking for Jesus, but Jesus went to this lonely, isolated woman to “enlighten” her. Jesus purposely went through Samaria to have an encounter with this woman. She had an encounter with Jesus and left “everything”. When I encountered Jesus. I wasn’t looking for Him, yet He came to me. I left my old life to follow my Lord. I was received into the One Holy Catholic Orthodox Apostolic Church on Oct. 26, 2014—the last Sunday in October—which always commemorates the feast of Christ the King in the Western Rite.

Nancy Tentzeras, Social Media Coordinator
Nancy Ann (Rafeedie) Tentzeras was born and raised in the Washington, DC area and is the youngest daughter of two faithful servants of God, serving the St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Washington, DC, upon arriving from Palestine over 57 years ago. Nancy’s spiritual faith grew from the teachings and foundation her parents provided for her and her two siblings. Nancy has been an active member of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, from baptism to present day. She has been involved in practically every organization over the years from Teen SOYO, Sunday School Teacher, Ladies Myrrh-Bearing Society, and currently is serving as Parish Council Recording Secretary.

Over 22 years ago, Sub Deacon Nicholas Tentzeras and Nancy were married, where they continued to work together on many ministries until recently due to health issues, including establishing the church web site, being members of the Orthodox Christian Network web development team, and proofreaders on the Orthodox Christian Study Bible. Nancy currently maintains the Church and Church Festival Facebook Pages. She enjoys keeping everyone abreast of the happenings within the Church Community. Nancy looks forward to working as the Social Media Coordinator of the Antiochian Women of the East (AWE), communicating the activities of the parishes of AWE, along with spiritual readings and messages from the diocese.

Nancy enjoys spending time with her family and has always had the passion for reading, travel and pursuing higher education, where she has received two Master of Science degrees in Computer Systems Management, and Project Management. After working in the private sector in telecommunications for 15 years, Nancy is currently a PMP certified Project Manager for the Federal Government.

Patron Saint: St. Anna, the mother of the Theotokos, whose memory is celebrated on July 25th (also on September 9th for the commemoration of Joachim and Anna together).

Favorite Bible Verse: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4 -7

Favorite Spiritual/Inspirational Book: The War Room: Prayer is a Powerful Weapon by Chris Fabry adaptation of screenplay by Alex and Stephen Kendrick.

Meet the Parish Chapters
St John the Evangelist Church, Beaver Falls, PA
Our ladies are choir members, Sunday school teachers, kitchen cleaner uppers, meal planners, council members, seasonal decorators and FOCUS volunteers.
St. Anthony Orthodox Church, Butler, PA

St. Anthony is a small church with a big heart! While we don’t have a formal ladies’ group right now, the women of St. Anthony in Butler are a beautiful blend of “Marys and Marthas” and contribute to the church, each in their own way. If you visit the Butler area, please come and worship with us!

The past few years, we have had annual camping retreats. This year, instead of camping, we had a wonderful one day retreat led by a new member of our community, Melinda Johnson, at the home of one of our ladies. Melinda led us in activities that helped us know each other better and taught us about a saint that she has been researching.

The ladies of our church run and organize one or two rummage sales each year (with the help of our men doing the heavy work). Our most recent rummage sale’s proceeds are being sent to IOCC to help with their hurricane relief work.

The past few years, St. Anthony’s parish has supported an outreach in the Cranberry Township area with services in nearby Mars, PA. The ladies of both locations are enjoying growing friendships with one another. The Outreach continues its efforts to enter the community and build to become a mission church. With God's grace and the support of St. Anthony’s, the group is once again striking out to gather new people in the Mars and Cranberry areas. They are now attempting to begin consistent Typica (with communion) services in Mars at the (Old) St. Kilian’s Catholic Church in Mars.

This Advent season, at the beginning of the Nativity Fast, the Cranberry Outreach group will: participate in the Toys for Tot's campaign for needy children in Butler, continue sending Health Kits (St. Anthony's and the Outreach have sent 150 so far!) to International Orthodox Christian Charities to help those affected by the various natural disasters in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Mexico, and Syria, and in 2018, the Cranberry Outreach looks to begin an Introduction to Orthodoxy Bible Study in the local community. The group hopes to sow many seeds in the Cranberry community so that Christ can grow His Church. St. Anthony's and the Outreach ask for your prayers as they get to work offering our faith to the local community.

We want to introduce one very special lady at St. Anthony, Dollie Sipos (photograph on left). Dollie is one of the founders of our church and the writer of all the large icons in our church.

St George Antiochian Church, Washington DC

The Ladies Myrrh Bearing Society of St George is an enthusiastic group of ladies that come together to support all events at St. George and to help in the community in general. From cooking and preparing sweets for our bazaar to organizing fund raisers to decorate and beautify our Church, our Ladies group leads the way.

We are committed to maintain and continue our beautiful traditions of the Orthodox Church and the Antiochian hospitality.

These traditions are demonstrated by the cooking sessions in preparation for big events, like our yearly bazaar, holiday parties or in support of family events. Our ladies organize and decorate the church for Pascha, feed the homeless, support the NAB project and assist the shut-ins and those in need. As this year draws near to the end, the St. George Ladies Myrrh-Bearing Society will soon be decorating for Christmas and having our December retreat.

We are grateful to all our women for their dedication to St. George and the community.
St. George, Allentown, PA

The Ladies Aid of Allentown, PA was reorganized under Fr. Anthony’s blessings in December 2001. Currently, the Ladies Aid of Allentown, PA is sponsoring a child from Syria. They have also raised money for an orphanage in Syria, as well as for the Antiochian Women’s annual projects. Another humanitarian project that truly touched our hearts was saving a young teenager’s life. The Ladies Aid of Allentown knew of a teenager in Syria who was in need of surgery due to head trauma sustained in a motorcycle accident. Through many generous donations of parishioners, the Ladies Aid raised enough money so that the teenager was able to have his surgery. The young man’s father sent a letter of appreciation saying that the surgery saved his son’s life. The women continue to work diligently to serve the Lord, the church, and the needy here in the community and abroad.

St. George, Little Falls, NJ

The Ladies’ Society at Saint George is a very active organization. It is involved in various functions throughout the year such as a Thanksgiving pastry sale which consumes days of work but also gives a rewarding income to benefit our church, the yearly Spinach Pie sale, preparing food and pastries for the church festival and chairing the Saint George’s day hafle.

For Antiochian Woman's Month in March, the ladies collect the baskets, usher, read the epistle in both languages and host a Lenten dinner.

Some of the profits realized from the above functions are sent yearly to the Antiochian Orthodox Women of North America to be used for various humanitarian projects. Last year we presented a sum of $14,000 to the Parish Council to assist in the expenses of the church and we donated $1,800 to the church charity committee.

In addition to fundraisers, the last two years our Spiritual and Educational committee ran a series of lectures during Great Lent. They were very well attended and enlightening. Our humanitarian committee also organized a few events for the elderly which made them very happy.

We are blessed with many wonderful and hard working women whose Goal is to work together to Glorify God and to support our church.

Ikhas Munayyer, President
The Ladies Society at Saint Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church, Hunt Valley, MD

The mission statement for our church is: “We, Saint Mary’s Orthodox Christian Church invite you to join in Christ with us. We provide the Greater Baltimore area with fellowship, service, worship and community. Come and See!” and as such, our Ladies Society makes every effort to participate in and create activities and events that reflect our mission. The Ladies Society has been in its current form for about one year with just over 70 members offering activities and events that appeal to our ladies interests in terms of religious, fund- raising and humanitarian aspects as well as having fun and fellowship too.

Religious:

We have Holy Bread making workshop to teach the ladies how to make the Prospohora.

Psalter Reading Group: We initiated a Psalter reading group during Lent 2017 which was well received by our ladies in terms of spiritual enrichment. They enjoyed the quiet time had 15 minutes a day to read and reflect on the psalms.

Christian Women Today: A monthly program, led by Fr. Damaskinos, is to help the ladies with the issues they are facing on a daily basis as Christian Women today as well as foster fellowship. These sessions include discussion about how we manage our Christian values whilst dealing with everyday situations in life, work, and family.

Antiochian Women’s Book Club: This is our first year participating in the AW Book Club and have a lovely group of 15 ladies signed up to participate in and discuss the recommended book this fall.

Humanitarian:

Each Thanksgiving, Winter and Pascha, we prepare much needed food and clothing baskets for about ten children of no income/low income families in our area. We work directly with the school counselors to ensure that the items reach those that are truly in immediate need.

We collect donations of men’s winter coats and jackets as well as bulk food to give to The Franciscan Centre in downtown Baltimore where they run a daily food kitchen for the homeless.

Our Hospitality Committee works hard to reach out and help those in need in our Parish community. The team reaches out in the form of telephone calls, cards, and with practical help such as preparing meals or offering to run errands.

Fundraising:

The Ladies Society works hard on the food preparations for our Annual Mediterranean Food Festival each year in September, which includes the ladies rolling grape leaves for the festival.

Two other fundraising events that opened our Church to those from outside our parish community are the Lenten Food Fundraising Take-Out and the International Cookie Walk and Christmas Bazaar. These fundraising events helped to showcase the international community of our parish through homemade vegan food and international Christmas cookies made by our ladies.

The ladies also have regular fundraising coffee hour lunches after Liturgy throughout the year.

And of course, fun and fellowship is on our agenda. The Ladies Society includes activities that help us with fellowship, arts and our annual summer dinner.
Antiochian Women Ministries - St. Mary’s Orthodox Church, Johnstown, PA

+ Reverse Advent Calendar: The parishioners take new laundry baskets home, each containing a poster which explains each day of the Forty Day Advent Season (Nov. 15 - Dec. 24). Each participant is asked to place a boxed, canned, or bagged non-perishable food item in the basket (no fresh food items or glass containers). The filled basket brought back to church on Dec. 24th.

+ IOCC Health/Hygiene Kits: We assembled 45 kits in early October 2017 to assist hurricane victims.

+ Altar Ministry: This is a perpetual ministry with Altar Cloths changed per season and maintained, also the church is decorated with flowers for the feast days.

+ Ladies’ Lunch: Our parish maintains a SCRIP Fundraising Program. The ladies gather for lunch at a local restaurant monthly and purchase SCRIP for that restaurant from the SCRIP Fundraising Chairwoman

St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, NY

This past June we hosted a concert by The Rhapsody Players, a local group who specialize in pop music of the 60’s and 70’s. It was very well attended and delightful. We made a beautiful dessert table for during intermission which was enjoyed by everyone attending the concert.

We offer prayers for the repose of our departed sister, Emileen Hanna, departed this life Nov. 12th.

We prepared and held our annual Christmas Boutique on Dec. 2, 2017. This event has become a neighborhood treasure. Each year we sell Syrian sweets and lunch as well as china, gift items, books, CD’s, Christmas decorations, and more. We raffle beautiful gift baskets and baskets of cheer. We also have Santa Claus for the children to take pictures with him.

Several ladies are choir member. December 10th we had a Christmas Carol Sing along in the church.

On January 7, 2018, we will host our annual Epiphany Luncheon in the Church Hall. It will be catered by Hayat and we always welcome our brothers and sisters from St. Nicholas Cathedral to share this day with us.

We will choose a humanitarian project in the New Year and of course will support the NAB Project for next year.

Wishing you well!

Sandra Arida, AW president
A Great Love Story, by Maria Photini Koropsak

My journey to the Orthodox Church began at the time of my conception. It is a great love story of the King who sought out a peasant and made her His bride.

My King is Jesus and I am the peasant.

I was a cradle Roman Catholic, born in Quito, Ecuador to a family of six. My mom is the heroine in this story because she led me on the path of faith I have today.

We arrived in the USA in 1961 and my mom soon found out that my dad was living a double life. Besides the family that I knew, he also had several other children. My mom went through years of pain. By the time I turned 17, it was time to leave the life of abuse that we had all experienced over 18 years from my dad.

My mom, being the amazing strong woman of faith, lived her life focused on Jesus and her beautiful traditions. We went to church, we prayed, and she consistently told us “God is so good” even in the midst of her pain and struggles.

My own faith was lukewarm, I was riding on the coattails of my mamacita’s faith. When I had any issues, I would call her and she would say, “I will light my candles and put in my coins. God will hear our prayers.” Her favorite Saint was St. Jude, because he was the saint of the impossible and she believed he could pray for the impossible and make it possible, by the grace of the Lord. October 1992, my mamacita was diagnosed with cancer. By the time the doctors discovered it, she was terminal. She came to live with me for the ten months left of her life here on earth. On Aug. 6, 1993, The Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, my mamacita went to be with the Lord whom she adored.

On Aug. 31, 1993, three weeks after her death, I encountered, during our vacation in Wildwood, NJ – in a gift shop – a woman who shared the Lord with me. That day my life changed. I started going to church and I had a hunger for God as I never had before. I reached out to a friend of mine who was an evangelical Christian. She brought me to a Bible teaching church where I started to hear “expository teaching” on the word of God. This teaching lead me to the love of God’s Holy Scriptures.

My passion for God’s word continued to grow. I would visit many churches during my faith journey, Baptist, Methodist, Assemblies of God and many others. I was searching for something, but I wasn’t sure at the time what it was. I did hold on to a scripture that had become my anchor after my conversion. I was seeking my God, my King and I did not want to stop until I found Him. To me, it seemed there had to be more to worshiping God than singing some songs and hearing an inspirational sermon.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 29:11-14.

I raised my children in the evangelical church and taught them to love and honor God. Alex, my oldest, went to Philadelphia Biblical University, where he studied Biblical theology. In 2007, during his sophomore year in college, we moved to PA and his and my journey took an amazing turn.

Alex was going through his own journey, while studying at PBU, he was seeking the apostolic church. The church that Christ had established. What did that church look like? What did the worship of God in that early church look like? In his search, he came across the Church Fathers, a discovery that would change his own path and ultimately mine.

Alex would come home and share traditions, God’s covenants and the early church. We would talk theology, something I was ignorant of and then ‘sacraments’, which as an evangelical, sounded very ritualistic; but I would later come to understand that they are means by which God’s grace is poured out on us.

There was an incredible yearning in my heart for God that no bible study, women’s retreat, inspirational mes-
message could satisfy. In 2010, I came across the verses in John 6:48-58 which I had read so many times since 1993.

“48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

In my journal on 10/25/2010, I wrote “Your holy Eucharist, the “thanksgiving” that we can partake of, if we are willing.” I need this bread and wine which is your body and blood – but when will I be able to partake and in what church my Lord? Please guide me and direct me, my Savior!”

That search took me back to the Roman Catholic church for 3 years, but while in the church I found that my heart was still not “home”. There were doctrines that didn’t line up with the Bible which I held to as an evangelical Christian so my soul was still not home. My son Alex had become an Orthodox Christian in December 2009 and I had been at his Chrismation and had visited his church in Mechanicsburg and other Orthodox churches since 2009. I came to love the worship and traditions of the Orthodox Church. I especially loved the reverence. I found that the Bible led me to the Orthodox Church, its liturgies and its traditions and the church lead me right back to the Bible. There was one church in particular that I was drawn to, it was a Western rite Orthodox Church. It closely resembled the liturgy of the RC church but there was a purity in the liturgy that pulled me in. Every time I attended a liturgy, I saw people going up to receive the “Holy Eucharist”. I yearned in my heart to receive the “bread and body” of our Lord in this church. There was a purity of worship in the Orthodox Church that took me to heaven every time I attended a liturgy. The incense, the chanting, the prayers were all directed to the “right worship” of God. When I heard the prayers Father would recite before ascending the altar, there was a reverence that took me back to the OT and it was Aaron approaching and entering into the Holy of Holies. Only now, with the pure and holy and perfect sacrifice “Our blessed Lord”.

On June 24, 2014 – the feast of St. John the Baptist, after much prayer and discernment I was received as a catechumen to this wonderful church - St. John the Baptist. It was truly fitting that I would be received as a catechumen on the feast of our Lord. I had to choose a patron saint. The woman at the well had been an inspiration to me at my conversion. I always pondered her life. She had a past (like me) yet Jesus purposely went through Samaria to have an encounter with this woman. Jesus went to this lonely, isolated woman to ‘enlighten’ her. I found out that her baptismal name became “Photini” which means ‘enlightened’. She did not go looking for Jesus, but she was longing for him, waiting for her Messiah. She had an encounter with Jesus and left ‘everything’. I related to her in so many ways. I too had left my ‘past’ when I encountered Jesus. I wasn’t looking for Him, yet He came to me. St. Photini became my patron saint and I would take her name when I was Chrismated into the Holy Orthodox Church.

I was received on Oct. 26. 2014 – The feast of Christ the King.

So – this peasant, who had nothing became a bride of our Lord in His Holy Church on the feast of Our King. Glory be to God!
As Antiochian women, we are guided by the four pillars of the Antiochian Women’s Mission statement:

Develop a spirit of Christian leadership, awareness, and commitment,
Develop deeper understanding of our Holy Orthodox Faith,
Express love and service through charity, and
Enhance fellowship.

With these goals as our guide, the Sisterhood meets every September, at the beginning of the Liturgical Year, to plan our activities for the coming year. In September 2017, we met in the parish hall over a pot-luck breakfast and planned a number of events, each tied to one of the four pillars of the Mission Statement. Below are some of the activities we decided on that day:

1) Develop a Spirit of Christian leadership, awareness, and commitment:

We are putting together a booklet, “The Holy Cross Sisterhood,” which will be distributed to all the women in the church, and copies will be included in the church’s “new member packets.” In this way, we’ll let all women know they are welcomed into our Sisterhood.

Also, we are planning a summer tea/garden party for older girls becoming women and mature women in the church. This activity’s goal is to give the girls an opportunity to learn about the women around them. The girls will move from table to table to interview the women and learn about their careers, and how they incorporate their holy Orthodox faith into their career, their schooling, and their day to day work.

Lastly, each year we spend a work day at the Monastery of Saint Nina (who is our patron saint), to honor her by helping the nuns with needed chores and tasks.

2) Develop a deeper understanding of our Holy Orthodox Faith:

To fulfill this goal, we have two activities. First, a book club, which studies books recommended by our members and blessed by Father Gregory, our priest. This year’s book are “Father Arseny, 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father” and “Becoming a Healing Presence,” by Albert S. Rossi.

Our second activity to deepen our spiritual understanding will be attending the annual Antiochian Women’s Retreat at Antiochian Village during the Paschal Lent.

3) Express love and service through charity:

The Sisterhood is involved in many charitable giving activities. At Christmas, we sponsor twenty needy children by setting up a Christmas giving tree; each “ornament” represents a child and parishioners take as many as they wish. Each child receives three gifts purchased, wrapped, and delivered by members of our parish.

The Guild of Blessed Olga is an on-going, year round, knitting, crocheting and sewing project. The women make booties, mittens, hats and scarves for many organizations in our community, to help needy men women and children stay warm in the winter months. Prayer shawls are also made by our women and given to sick parishioners to wrap them in the comfort of prayer.

4) Enhance fellowship:

All the Sisterhood activities enhance our fellowship, of course, but we still plan special events each year — just for fun and camaraderie. Last year we went on a tour of wineries in Virginia and to Longwood Gardens. This year we are hoping to do another local garden trip.

We host bridal and baby showers for the first child born to a family attending our parish — for some it is their first child; for others, it may be the third child but the first one born into our Holy Cross Family. This year we have three weddings and a few baby showers coming up!
The Sisterhood of St. Thekla consists of twenty wonderful ladies. As a Sisterhood, we focus on organizing events within Holy Ascension, organizing humanitarian efforts on behalf of Holy Ascension Church, and supporting the Antiochian Women’s Annual NAB Project. Our sisters decided they wanted to cover the annual dues with proceeds from our efforts instead of having the dues paid from Holy Ascension’s general operating budget.

For the past two years, we have operated without a President or Chairperson. In the past year, we have accomplished the following:

- Assembled baskets for our 16 college students as a way to remind them that we love them and are praying for them as they endeavor to pursue their studies. These 16 students are a mix of college students of our parishioners and students from two local colleges with active OCFs.
- Sponsored the annual wall calendars from Vestal Publishing for the parish.
- Provided Christmas gifts for 15 children as part of The Lord’s Pantry “Adopt a Family for Christmas” Program. The Lord’s Pantry is a local food pantry that has served our community for over 50 years. We provided all the requested gifts as well as grocery store gift cards for their Christmas meal. This was our third year participating in this program. We are preparing to support this beautiful ministry in our community for a fourth year.
- Held a Nativity Baklawa Sales to raise funds to support the 2017 Antiochian Women’s Project “Strengthening the Ministries of our Church” and to pay our annual dues.
- Provided meals for one week for one family in our parish after the birth of their third child.
- Hosted two social events: a cookie exchange and a Theophany party, both held at one of our sister’s houses. These are annual events that provide a lovely time of fellowship outside of Church.
- Hosted a Father’s Day Picnic and coordinated our annual pastoral visit with +Sayidna Thomas.
- Collected paper icons to support an Icon Drive.
- Collected funds for FOCUS to purchase backpacks and school supplies for children in need.
- For the past few months, one sister manages the social media for Vision for Life, a Christian non-profit organization offering pregnant women alternatives to abortion.

May God continue to bless our efforts!

Respectfully submitted,
Coleen Moses

COMFORTING CREATIONS

St. James the Apostle Orthodox Christian Church, Westminster, MD

This ministry was started by a small group of women from our church to provide hats, blankets, and prayer shawls for Carroll Hospital's Family Birth Center and Cancer Center.

We are a group of eight women who try to meet monthly at one of the member’s houses for a couple of hours. We work on our projects, share lunch and socialize.

We are approaching our one year anniversary and to date we have donated 231 items to the Carroll Hospital’s Family Birth Center and Cancer Center. With our donations we either provide a tag or gift bag with a small prayer card and also a postcard icon of St. James with our contact information.
The Antiochian Women of St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church support the church and community in a variety of ways. The women begin each year anew in September, and come together monthly to pray together and discuss the events of the year, the purpose of our ministry that year, and ways we can better connect with and support one another. In the 2017-2018 year we have decided our ministry needs to be directed at community connection, as well as outreach as our church nears completion of the long-term construction project from the last three years. It is time for us to look outward beyond the walls of our Parish hall.

We have some annual events we will host this year, such as the St. Nicholas party for our children and their friends, sponsoring children through the Salvation Army Angel Tree, hosting the annual parish picnic, and hosting an Easter egg hunt at Pascha. New this year we are connecting with one another to strengthen our inner community by running a Secret Sister group, in which we are paired off and bring gifts to surprise our secret sister for a season. This is a fun way to remember one another beyond Liturgy and to think of one another in our day-to-day lives. We have also set up a bulletin board for members to post news on; we’re creating a “selfie-station” to help highlight the very diverse nature of St. Basil the Great; we have an active Facebook community, and we’re heading up a photo directory to help all parishioners put faces to names and show their day-to-day lives.

Finally, we have placed great emphasis on supporting those in our community who are alone and in need - such as visiting members following surgery, bringing in diapers for new mamas, or, especially, reaching out to the many women in our parish who have husbands working with the military overseas, either as contractors or as active duty military members. These women all need our love and support and present a huge opportunity for our church.

The Antiochian Women of St. Basil are a wonderful, caring, and fun-loving group of women who look to love and serve our parish in big and small ways. We look to make our community warm and inviting to those visiting, and to support one another.

Saint John the Baptist Mission, Lewistown, MD

Saint John the Baptist Orthodox Church began as a small mission of the Charismatic Episcopal Church (called Lamb of God Church) on Christmas Eve, 2005 under the pastoral leadership of Fr. James K. Hamrick, a CEC priest and a former United Methodist pastor. The congregation, made up mostly of former Methodists, found a historic chapel for lease in Lewistown, Maryland, just north of Frederick, Maryland, an hour west of Baltimore and an hour northwest of Washington D.C. The chapel, originally built in 1833 as a Methodist Church, has been home for the congregation since.

In the first year, St. John the Baptist Mission chartered the Antiochian Women of St. John the Baptist, but after a couple of years, the ministry experienced a hiatus as the women were without a leader after the first president stepped down having moved from the area. But by the grace of God, Maria Koropsak, who had been chatechized and received into the Church three years earlier, agreed this past year to serve as the Antiochian Women’s President. With Maria’s leadership and Fr. James’ spiritual direction, the Antiochian Women ministry is currently experiencing a renewal, drawing from a number of new members who have entered the Church since the group was last active and contributing to the freshness and vitality of the ministry.
St. Ellien, Brownsville, PA

Sunday, October 8, 2017, His Grace Bishop Thomas, joined with former and present parishioners of St. Ellien Orthodox Church in Brownsville, PA as we celebrated our 100th Anniversary. In addition to His Grace Bishop THOMAS, the Hierarchial Divine Liturgy was celebrated with Fr. George Alberts, one of our former priests that served St. Ellien and now serves in St. Mary Orthodox Church in Wilkes Barre, PA, and Fr. Mark Sahady who grew up in St. Ellien, and serves as Chaplain at St. Thelka Convent in Glenville, PA. Deacon Glenn McIntyre, who is assigned to serve our parish on a weekly basis, said “It is a special occasion for us to be here after 100 years and still gather within all the walls of all those that have preceded us”.

Following the Divine Liturgy, His Grace Bishop Thomas, along with our two clergy guests, Father Don Shadid of St. Mary Orthodox Church in Johnstown, PA, and Father Rodney Torbic of St. George Serbian Orthodox Church in Carmichaels, PA joined us for the Anniversary Banquet.

His Grace addressed those gathered expressing his joy in seeing our small parish reach our 100th Anniversary. He emphasized that God has provided for St. Ellien during the past 100 years and was served by many dedicated individuals entrusted with her care and who labored in support of our parish.

We have tried to meet the demands and challenges that face us since our church was established in 1917. Through the prayers and intercessions of our faithful and devoted clergy, the generosity of all present and past benefactors and friends, the workers, singers, altar servers, Myrrh Bearing Ladies Society, and all the hard working parishioners who helped through the years, God has continued to bless us. If we continue with one mind, one heart, and one accord, we are assured that nothing can stand in our way. Our prayer is that we continue to receive these blessings!

St. Anthony, Bergenfield, NJ

The women of Saint Anthony’s have begun to plan their new year by encouraging all the women of the parish to join us to help our parish, others in need and grow in our faith. The women were busy in September helping with our church’s first ever very successful Bergen Street Truckfest.

Our first philanthropic endeavor, “Socktoberfest,” had great parish participation. Hundreds of socks for women and children were collected to benefit Oasis, a haven for women and children in Paterson, N.J.

A coat drive is being organized for the late fall. All hands are on deck for our church Harvest Festival this month. Our women are looking forward to our annual book discussion, holiday dinner and garage sale in the spring.

Respectfully submitted by Betty Gakos

St. Patrick, Bealeton, VA

Our parish participates in the food drives, helping at the local transitional housing, and in different opportunities in the local community such as installing flooring, fixing roofs, etc. Our efforts and service are from the entire parish working together.
Our Lady Theotokos Society is grateful to serve God, church and community, which is our main purpose. We are very thankful for the beautiful and talented women of our church, who devote their time, prayers, and fellowship in every project or activity we sponsor.

Every year we raise money through fundraisers for a worthy cause. In the past, we have raised thousands of dollars for the IOCC for emergency kits. We are blessed to have the support of our Parish Council and parishioners. The women sponsor numerous Syrian food sales, such as butter bread, spinach and meat pies, kibbee and baklawa. Our parishioners are very generous. With donations and food sales, we have assembled over 100 emergency kits, and have given monetary donations of over $4,000 to IOCC. The men of our church always help with our baking and it always turns out to be a great day of fun and fellowship.

Our fundraiser this year is to support the hurricane and flood victims of Texas and West Virginia, Syrian Relief and emergency kits. We enjoy having the children of our parish make the kits.

We also support humanitarian acts of mercy. Every year we donate to Food For Hungry People, the IOCC, and our local monastery, the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA. Many women of our parish have special relationships with the nuns there, and our retreats to the monastery are filled with prayer and thanksgiving.

We also support our community, and have given our time and support, as well as monetary contributions, to many local charities.

The women of our church are very active in our parish. They organize ushers for communion, coffee hour after liturgy, our yearly Mardi Gras Dinner Dance, the annual Father’s Day breakfast, and our annual food festival. We spend weeks preparing and getting ready for our food festival. We serve as readers, church schoolteachers, and Choir and Parish Council members. Our women are mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, friends, and are truly a light for our church family. Anytime we are called upon to help or assist, we are willing.

We also try to plan a fall and spring activity for the women as well.
Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral, Pittsburgh, PA

The Lenten season was full of activity that prepared the women for Pascha and put them in the right mindset to serve and rejoice. First, they cooked and served a delicious Lenten meal after a Wednesday night Pre-Sanctified Liturgy.

Many of the women attended a Lenten retreat at the Antiochian Village in Bolivar, PA while many more women attended a lecture given by our very own Fr. Joshua Makoul on the Saturday of the retreat.

On some Saturdays, the ladies made mamool to sell it to their fellow parishioners for their Pascha meals. Palm Sunday candles were also decorated and sold. There were even lessons on Lazarus Saturday to teach people how to make palm crosses!

Finally, the women took the responsibility of decorating the funeral bier for Good Friday.

The women also cooked a filling meal for the charity FOCUS so they could serve it to the underserved members of the Pittsburgh community.

While there might not have been as much going on during the summer months, the women made sure to keep active. For Mother's Day, a morning retreat was held at The Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA. It was a spiritually enlightening day as we were able to spend meals with the nuns, as well as have a discussion with Mother Christophora, the abbess of the monastery.

On September 25, the women hosted a brunch after liturgy to raise money for the nuns of The Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery in Saxonburg, PA which was heavily damaged by a fire earlier in the year. From that brunch we were able to raise about $1,700 to support them in their time of need.

God rest her soul, Khouria Joanne Abdalah chaired the first Calendar party on September 17, 2000. On November 5th, we celebrated the 17th year anniversary of the annual calendar party. Every year our church raises the highest amount of money for the NAB project in the Eastern Region Diocese (AWE).
The Antiochian Women at Ss. Peter and Paul in Potomac, Maryland were greatly saddened at news of the passing of our beloved Priest Emeritus, Archpriest Fr. George Rados. Yet, his spirit of earnest charity will forever be a part of our works in the Church. It is indeed fitting that on the day of Fr. George’s 40-day Memorial, we will prayerfully compile goods for dozens of backpacks with sundry gifts and toiletries for a local Maryland homeless outreach. Additionally, we will prepare the Christmas gift bags for our church members who find it challenging to come to church services regularly due either to illness or advanced age. Antiochian Women artistically decorate boxwood Christmas wreaths to be sold, with proceeds directed to the Children’s Relief Fund, a ministry initiated by Fr. George, and now administered by Very Rev. Fr. Isaac Crow, our priest at Ss. Peter and Paul. Two children are sponsored annually through the Children’s Relief Fund. Poinsettias and greens will adorn the Church at the Nativity, similar to Holy Week and Pascha when Antiochian Women prayerfully prepare the Naach with spring flowers. Finally, a lunch celebrating the festive Christmas season and fellowship together in Christ will be held at a local eatery later in December.

The Ss Peter and Paul Antiochian Women with the assistance from parishioners have an active ministry to quietly support those in our parish with meals, prayers, and cards. An initiative called the “Angel Fund” offers grocery cards on church feast days to those who may benefit. Funding is partially provided through an elegant Mother’s Day weekend fashion show, a consistent sold-out event. This year, additional proceeds from the fashion show supported a local food pantry. Members of Antiochian Women model the fashions, always a delightful (and comical) surprise, though no member has yet to be tapped for a real modeling career! This year’s fashion show was dedicated to the memory of Madelyn Nader, a dear, steadfast and inspiring member who loved the Lord.

A Lenten service project was supported by our Antiochian Women, who helped purchase and pack over 25,000 rice and bean meals as well as tomato basil rotini for a local food pantry. The entire parish participated in this undertaking, accomplished in less than two hours during Coffee Hour! In addition, the ladies hosted a beautiful reception for all parishes after the Sunday of Orthodoxy Service to start off Great Lent.

Antiochian Women at Ss. Peter and Paul donated funds to International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) for both Syrian refugees as well as hurricane relief. Additional funds were raised to help church ministries for the Archdiocese. In addition to contributing directly to Ss. Peter and Paul, Antiochian Women replaced a food warmer in the church kitchen, which helped significantly during the annual bazaar.

Seasons pass, times change for the Antiochian Women at Ss Peter and Paul with some key losses among those dear in our community. The love of Christ, our service to the Lord, and fellowship for each other is our foundation and our joy. We warmly invite and welcome those visiting the Washington, D.C. area to visit our Ss. Peter and Paul parish on Sundays.
Sisterhood of St. Olympia of St. John Chrysostom Church, York, PA

Throughout the past year, the Sisterhood of St. Olympia of St. John Chrysostom Church has continued to support a variety of fundraisers, humanitarian projects, and service projects.

The Christmas Card Project and the Bakeless Bake Sale raised $1157 for the NAB project. We have an ongoing food drive which benefits a local food bank. We also helped with the Bridge of Hope, a local ministry to single mothers and their children.

Christmas packages were sent to college students and military personnel. Lenten collections were taken to purchase grocery gift cards for seminary families.

The AOW provided hospitality for Bishop Thomas’ visit in November, arranged flowers and dyed eggs for Pascha, and continued to organize the weekly coffee hours following Liturgy. Meals were arranged for the sick as needed, and three mercy meals following funerals were prepared and served by our women.

Social events were scheduled throughout the year: Ladies nights out, beer and wine tastings and a spa day.

At our May meeting, the membership voted to start meeting on the first Sunday of each month, starting in September. At each meeting, the life of a female saint will be presented by one of our members. We look to these saints for inspiration as we strive to grow together in our Orthodox Faith.

At our September meeting, the life and ministries of St. Olympia (the patron saint of our AOW chapter) were presented. We also learned her troparion so that we can sing it at all of our meetings. An icon of St. Olympia was purchased by the Sisterhood and was present for the first time at our October meeting. It will be at the center of all of our meetings as we ask for her guidance.

In response to the need presented by Hurricane Harvey, the membership voted to assemble “Clean-up Buckets” to be sent to IOCC. 28 buckets were taken to the Maryland distribution center.

In the coming months, we plan to continue the above ministries in addition to trying new projects and social events. For the Feast of St. Nicholas, we will be cooperating with our teen SOYO to provide gifts for several families in the York area.

It is a joy to work and fellowship together as sisters in Christ.

The Ladies Aid of St. George, Allentown, PA

The Ladies Aid of Allentown, PA was reorganized under Fr. Anthony’s blessings in December 2001. Currently, the Ladies Aid of Allentown, PA is sponsoring a child from Syria. They have also raised money for an orphanage in Syria, as well as for the NAB projects.

Another humanitarian project that truly touched our hearts was saving a young teenager’s life. The Ladies Aid of Allentown knew of a teenager in Syria who was in need of surgery due to head trauma sustained in a motorcycle accident. Through many generous donations of parishioners, the Ladies Aid raised enough money so that the teenager was able to have his surgery. The young man’s father sent a letter of appreciation saying that the surgery saved his son’s life. They continue to work diligently to serve the Lord, the church, and the needy here in the community and abroad.
Holy Spirit Antiochian Orthodox Church, Huntington, WV

The Antiochian Women of Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Huntington, West Virginia gather each month on a Saturday afternoon for fellowship, refreshments, and a spiritual talk by our priest, Fr. John Dixon. Topics discussed are those that were suggested by the group and include the differences in the Orthodox calendar as compared to the Catholic and Protestant churches; reasons why Communion is not offered to non-Orthodox Christians; and the difference between the various Orthodox jurisdictions.

In addition to a social gathering, the Holy Spirit ladies also discuss a community organization that can be supported. In October of 2017, they collected items for the Ronald McDonald House Wish List and are currently supporting Lily’s Place, which provides medical care to infants suffering from Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) and offer non-judgmental support, education and counseling services to families and caregivers.

Also in the month of October, the ladies rolled up their sleeves and donned their aprons for the Annual Middle Eastern Dinner. In addition to the usual meal of kibbeh, cabbage rolls, green beans and rice, and salad, our Ethiopian ladies prepared a traditional Ethiopian meal that could be purchased as well. Because of the busy month, they marked Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday the first Sunday of November by sponsoring a coffee hour featuring pink themed foods and received donations for breast cancer awareness.

The ladies of Holy Spirit are excited to become more involved in the activities of our combined dioceses.

St. Mary’s, Chambersburg, PA

St. Mary’s in Chambersburg, PA is a warm, loving church home. The Antiochian Women chapter is not a “separate” chapter, but all of our women are active and involved in God’s work. Each and every woman brings their unique talents to our Parish. The women in St. Mary’s raise money for the NAB Project, run Sunday School, provide mercy meals, offer support to the home bound and sick and send birthday cards. Additionally, our women decorate for the holidays, run coffee hour weekly, organize food for special occasions, and prepare food for the annual church festival. This year alone, the women handmade over 600 cabbage rolls to sell at the Festival.

Many people participated in a phosphora baking event to make sure that we always have enough communion bread.

We are a blessed group of women in our congregation who strive to emulate our Patron Saint, Mary.
St. Andrew’s, Lewes, DE

St. Andrew’s Church, Lewes, Delaware has witnessed a very blessed and productive year. We are the only Orthodox church in Sussex county and are also located in a resort town. As a result, we have experienced continuous growth in our membership since moving into our new church in 2012. This fall, under the direction of our new Pastor Fr. Herman Acker, we completed our building expansion project, enlarging our Sanctuary, added the Great Hall and several Sunday School classrooms to create a 7,200-square foot facility.

His Grace Bishop THOMAS visited last month and dedicated the new annex in the name of our beloved Archpriest Fr. Boniface Black, the founder of our church, who reposed in the Lord August 2016. We also inducted six new members into the Order of St. Ignatius during Bishop THOMAS’ visit. A celebration luncheon in our new Great Hall followed the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, October 15.

The Antiochian Women began their year assembling health and school kits for the IOCC Project, as well as children’s items for the Treehouse Project in Wichita, Kansas. We at St. Andrew’s believe it is our purpose to work together to support our community in any way that we can. We have established several outreach programs to this end. Next week we begin our collection of non-perishable food items to be sent to the local food bank for the holidays.

Another project we are working on is our Angel Tree for the Christmas holidays. This is the second year for this project which proved to be very successful last year. Sunday School children participated by making “Angel” tags for the tree with the names of elderly patients from a local healthcare facility. Many of the patients do not have the support of family or friends, so our parishioners buy gift items they can use. The packages are delivered and placed under their tree. This way everyone is assured of receiving a gift for the holiday.

The Antiochian Women also support the local Veterans organizations. Every few months blankets are delivered to the Home of the Brave shelters for both men and women.

Our parishioners were deeply distressed by the reports of devastation caused by the hurricanes this year. The Antiochian Women immediately organized a clothing drive and many boxes were collected. These, along with monetary donations, were sent to the victims. Our prayers are with them as they struggle with unimaginable hardship and loss and begin to rebuild their lives.

To be able to support these many projects, St. Andrew’s organizes several fundraisers throughout the year. In the spring we sponsored a Yard Sale with items donated by our parishioners. Last weekend we held our Fall Festival which is our largest fundraiser of the year. A basket auction and bake sale was held in the Great Hall. Ethnic foods were provided for sale as well. Thanks to the generous support of friends and local businesses in our community, we were also able to publish an ad booklet which helped to generate additional monies. These funds help support our many charities and defray some of the costs of our building expansion.

The Antiochian Women of St. Andrew’s are planning more events for the coming year. With God’s love and blessing we hope to continue our missions for many years.

Yours in Christ,
Barbara Havrilla
St. James Anthiochian Orthodox Church, Pougkeepsie, NY

The Ladies Society of St. James Church is a small group of women who are always ready and willing to serve their Church. Starting four years ago, the ladies collect donations and prepare Thanksgiving dinners for as many as fifty families in need from the Hyde Park Food Pantry and Hudson Valley Community Services. An organization providing meals to families with an ill family member. During the Christmas season, dinner baskets are prepared for those families and a wish tree is set up for parishioners to help buy gifts for the children. We also host a Christmas party for the children of our parish, where gifts and candy are distributed by Santa. During Pascha, the ladies sell special candles and host a falafel sandwich sale to raise money.

St. Stephen The Protomartyr Orthodox Church - S. Plainfield, NJ

The women of St. Stephen organize children's events, collect for needy families during the holidays, donate to the First Aid Squad and the Children’s Relief Fund, participate in the festival and tricky tray, and visit local nursing homes. The women's group also holds fundraisers, such as Falafel sale, bake sale and Lenten lunches.

President, Barbara Fanik

The Ladies of Hamelat El-Teeb (Myrrh Bearing Women) are celebrating their 100th Anniversary

The Hamelat El-Teeb (Myrrh-Bearing Women) Society - is an organization of St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral of Brooklyn NY. They are devoted and energetic women. Theirs is a service of love for church and community since 1917. They concentrate on religious, cultural and humanitarian efforts in their activities as defined by their parent organization of the Archdiocese - the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America, Eastern Region. They are the very heart of the Cathedral.

We are forty-two members strong and love to serve the Lord. In December, we have our Christmas boutique and bake sale. In January, the ladies have lunch out at a restaurant to celebrate Epiphany with the Priest and his family and their friends.

The Ladies participate in Antiochian Women’s month in March by reading the epistle, ushering, taking the collection and helping in the kitchen. Every year the women host a Charity Luncheon for the Antiochian Women of North America Project.

The women help in the church serving the mercy meal if there is one on Sundays. Also, they share by preparing a Lenten dish to serve on Sunday of Orthodoxy.

Every year in October, the Ladies have a raffle/luncheon. We are sponsoring a child from Lebanon this year.
St. Michael's Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, Greensburg, PA

It is our guess that many of the activities and programs that will be enumerated in the women's reports from around our Archdiocese will be, in the main, very similar --- charitable endeavors, community projects, fellowship get-togethers, spiritual retreats, etc., being a few of the likely items on the list. To our delight, here at St. Michael's, we recently stumbled across a little exercise that at first glance seemed nice but, at the same time, a little quirky or odd. What has happened, however, has been quite beautiful in the appearance of, and our participation in, "The Graffiti Gratitude Wall." (see the accompanying picture)

The idea is to have the art of the Wall encourage people to consider what they are thankful for and to express that in words and pictures. Nice idea, right? What has been a little surprising is how quickly and in what numbers people passing the Wall are moved to take up a sharpie and make their mark. From small children to old folk, we have been inspired to pay attention and talk with each other about all the blessings we have, and to share them in paint and prose.

What are you thankful for?

St. George Church in New Kensington, PA

The Women of Saint George Church in New Kensington, PA. have been very busy this year. We have helped the community by purchasing Christmas gifts for underprivileged children and contributing for a monument of the Ten Commandments in the community. We have financially assisted our teens who go to Antiochian Village Camp, participated in the IOCC school and health kits, donated to the AWE Food for the Hungry campaign, donated and baked for the Syrian Relief Dinner. Throughout the year, we cook to fund charitable activities in the church and in the community.

It has been a devastating year for us with the loss of six women. We honored each of them by attending services together and presenting flowers or donations to the building fund in their memory and praying for their souls.

Fellowship is very evident throughout the year. We visit our shut ins on their birthdays and at Christmas time. While baking together we sing and share stories and laugh a lot. Activities such as annual picnics, outings in the winter and spring are regular events that promote fellowship and love within our Church and organization.

The women help maintain the kitchen at the church and are prepared to help financially in anything our church needs.

Respectfully,
Regina Namey, President
The Ladies Society of the Virgin Mary Church is small and very dedicated group of women. We are hard working and give our best when it comes to the Church and God.

We hold different fundraisers such as baking spinach pies and holiday cookies to raise money for certain functions in our church. The money raised gets donated to charities such as the children in Syria. We also collected coats and clothing that we had shipped overseas to needy people.

Every year during Thanksgiving, our church feeds 100 families with a complete Thanksgiving dinner. Each family will get a turkey, ham and all the trimmings. In December, we assist our Teen SOYO with collecting gifts for Adrus Orphanage.

During Lent we host the Seminarians of Saint Vladimir’s Seminary for dinner after Liturgy. All the women cook and bake Lenten food to serve them and their families. Our ladies are involved in everything the church does. We are always available and ready to help with any church function.

God bless all the women in our Ladies Society for all their hard work and dedication.

Fadia Sayegh, President
**A NOTE TO DIOCESAN PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTORS:**

All articles, news from parishes, photos, bios and messages are due the first of the month PRIOR to the month of publication. Please collect and email them to antiochianwomenna@gmail.com according to the schedule below:

The following items are needed to highlight your diocese:
1. Bios and photos from your Diocesan Bishop, Spiritual Advisor and Board Members.
2. Messages from your Diocesan Bishop, Spiritual Advisor and President.
3. Photos and news articles from the chapters. All articles must be about or of interest to the Antiochian Women.
4. Notices of diocesan gatherings, retreats, conferences, etc.

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To ensure publication in the next issue, please submit your news and articles by

Dear Sisters in Christ,

**Blessed Nativity! In anticipation, Christ is Born!**

It has truly been a joy to bring this issue of the Diakonia to each of you! AWE President Rula Osama Khoury has done an amazing job of gathering beautiful photos and stories from across the Diocese as well as the biographies of each of the Diocesan officers. Highlights of this issue are the messages from our beloved Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop THOMAS as well as beautiful testimony by Maria Koropsak “A Great Love Story” sharing her journey to Orthodoxy. Forgive me for any omissions or errors.

I pray this issue brings you hope, encouragement and enables you to finish the Nativity Fast with strength!

From snows on the East Coast to the fires across the West Coast, let us hold our Archdiocese in prayer and thank God for his mercies upon each of us.

In Christ,

*Melinda Bentz*