Christian leadership is always a leadership of service. “After that, he put water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded” (John 13:5). We lead by being true servants of each other and servants of God. Vision is the discernment and articulation of our goals, and of the pathways that take us there.

This leads me to ask, how is it, then, that we discover God’s vision for us – God’s vision for us as the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, as parishes, committees and mission or work teams, and even as Christian families and individuals?

Metropolitan JOSEPH’s understanding of God’s vision of the Archdiocese is easily recognized in the message offered to the Archdiocesan Board, the notes of the Board meeting, and in the Metropolitan’s message to the Antiochian House of Studies (published in this edition of The WORD). Metropolitan JOSEPH is calling for us to work together to understand God’s will and to do our Christian work. We are to be deliberate about what we do, and how we do it, and to understand that this is not about ego, but all about service. All this work needs to be done in an orderly way, and in concert with the bishops and with one another.

For years, Anthony Bashir, John Dalack, Richard Robbat, Ron Nicola and others of the Departments of Lay Ministries and Stewardship have been wrestling with ways to articulate responses to these ultimate questions of vision. They have borrowed the language and the models of best practices from modern business, psychology, education, and Orthodox writers to articulate an Orthodox understanding of how we Orthodox practice leadership. It is obvious to me that God has blessed our work, because the models help us to articulate what God is doing as we gather in His name. They have been working with parishes and parish councils to develop mission statements, vision statements, core-value statements, and then action plans. In their words, they bring us from form to meaning. In my words, they help us be deliberate in our Christian vocations.

An essential element of this work is to listen to each other. We sometimes are too afraid of not being heard to be able really to listen to the other. I have found that once I write down my thoughts, I am better able to hear someone else. Our tradition calls us to hear God and to see God in the other. The other includes my fellow parishioner and Parish Council member. The other includes my wife and children. Not that everything everyone says is from God, but by listening, really listening and understanding other perspectives, we are better able to discern.
etropolitan JOSEPH personally presided over the 35th anniversary celebrations this past September. The program featured expositions of our endeavors in theological education from St. Raphael’s era at the Halki Seminary up to the present. Featured speakers included the Dean of the Institute of St. John of Damascus at the University of Balamand, Fr. Porphyrios Georgi, Ph.D., and other Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) faculty and graduates of our Doctor of Ministry program. The meeting formats included lectures, panels of experts, and special presentations. In a yearlong preparation for this celebration, the thesis of St. Raphael was translated from the Patristic Greek in which it was written to English and Modern Greek by Rev. Patrick Viscuso, Ph.D., and further translated from English to Arabic by Dr. Adnon Trabulsi.

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH presided over the weekend events and, with Fr. Porphyrios, presented the Masters Degrees and Masters Crosses to the candidates at the Grand Banquet on Saturday evening, September 5th. He then led us in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, which closed the celebration, on Sunday, September 6.

The AHOS Alumni Association held its meetings on Friday and Saturday, September 4-5. Alumni of all AHOS programs, as well as second- and third-year St. Stephen’s students, were eligible for Alumni Association membership.

If we are willing to take the time to understand each other’s perspectives, which often requires an understanding of each other’s lives and histories, we will be enriched by what we discover through their experiences and wisdom. The same God that was there when I was a youth in Boston was there in everyone else’s youth. When I listen to understand the other, I can hear what God was doing in that situation, which informs my understanding of my own experience. Often it will call me to reevaluate my own understanding of myself. While this is sometimes uncomfortable, it is very enriching.

As a statement of faith, I believe that God gives every diocese all the tools that she needs to guide the faithful and to understand Himself and His will. Not every bishop, priest, council chair, parent or person need have every gift to know and to do God’s will, but every diocese is given all of the gifts that are necessary. It is the function of the bishop and his presbyters, as well as the Parish Council with the priest, to discern where the gifts are and to deliver them for the glory of God, for the building up of His Church, for the families of the faithful, and for all other persons in our communities. We need to get past our pride and accept the support that God has given His Church. In like manner, when others have need of our gifts, it is right for us to be generous with them.

Bishop John

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I am honored to be the first recipient of this St. Raphael Award. My understanding is that this award will be given by the Antiochian House of Studies to honor those who contribute in various ways to the advancement of Orthodox theological education.

I want you to know that I accept this award on behalf of all those who, over these past 35 years, have made such contributions to a cause to which we are called by Our Lord: “Take this Gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The House of Studies has fulfilled that mission, by God’s grace, as it has reached out to persons from all the Orthodox jurisdictions in North America; to Europe and South Africa; to Cyprus and Taiwan; to the Middle East and South America.

The aim has always been to “teach the teachers” in those areas, thus making an even greater impact in their respective spheres of responsibility. This means that those graduates have served in an even greater ministry, propagating our Holy Orthodox Faith wherever they may live. Their positions and specializations have been varied: as lay leaders and clergy; as iconographers and musicologists; as youth ministers and pastoral counselors. These, and more, have well represented the Antiochian House of Studies for the advancement of our Faith and the Gospel over these 35 years.

In a more personal way, special thanks needs to be given to the faculty and staff who, through the years, have made those things happen which guaranteed the greatest advancement for the House of Studies and the Church at large. They saw the need for a “school without walls” long before it became obvious, and for the use of electronic education long before others realized its far-reaching potential. Moreover, they never lost the need for direct contact with the students in both these residency programs and in the required praxis in their local parishes or institutions. This truly makes the House of Studies unique.

“...THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE: THOSE WHO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN, THOSE WHO WATCH THINGS HAPPEN, AND THOSE WHO WONDER WHAT JUST HAPPENED”
If we think about that challenge, as it first confronted AHOS, we realize that there are three kinds of people: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what just happened! The best thing about the House of Studies is that, from the very outset 35 years ago, they knew that those who only look to the past and the present are certain to miss the future. In terms of Orthodox theological education, this faculty and staff did make things happen, and thereby did “shape the future.”

As I see it, this “school without walls” is now part of our life. It continues to be responsible for the St. Stephens Diploma Program, the Master of Theology Program, the Doctor of Ministry Program, and, in the near future, with the Institute of St. Damascus at Balamand University, a Ph.D. Program. In each program, the praxis element makes the theological studies something which must be applied. This is fitting, as theology without praxis is merely philosophical study. We must emphasize, as the Antiochian House of Studies has in the past, both Orthodox theology and the way we incarnate it in our lives.

Finally, I want to express my personal thanks to the faculty and staff, and, as I accept this St. Raphael Award, I want you to know that I will continue to support and pray for the advancement of the Antiochian House of Studies.

In particular, I would like to thank the following faculty and staff members who have labored diligently to bring the vision of the Antiochian House of Studies to a reality:

Rev. Archdeacon Peter N. Boulikos, D.C.
Mr. Nicolas Gavriliu
Ms. Emmanuel Gergis, M.Div.
V. Rev. Dr. Joseph Antypas, D.Min.
V. Rev. Dr. Elias Bitar, D.Min.
Mr. Nicolae Gavriliu
Mr. Emmanuel Gergis, M.Div.
V. Rev. Dr. Joseph J. Allen, Director, Th.D.
Bishop John (AOA), D.Min.
Rev. Fr. David Alexander, D.Min.
V. Rev. Joseph Antypas, D.Min.
V. Rev. Dr. Elias Bitar, D.Min.
Rev. Silouan Rolando

At the Grand Banquet, students spoke on behalf of their classes. Here are two of those presentations.

JAMES M. ROSSETTI
Thank you for allowing me the rich blessing, not only to address you this evening, but to have studied under your service, guidance and example. I extend a very special place of gratitude to His Grace Bishop THOMAS, Father Joseph, Archdeacon Peter, our instructors, and, of course, Cheri, for their tireless work in providing not only superior theological education, but also, more importantly, the means by which such an education can be applied in our daily Christian struggle. I should like to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Grace Bishop JOHN, under whose tender care I was introduced and received into the Holy Orthodox Church, on the heels of crying out in brokenness to our merciful Father for His Truth and no longer my own. Finally, I rejoice that my parents, Symeon and Sophia, having been recently...
represented that of a man who is in the Ark, who lives to capture the Spirit, imparting it not just to his flock, but to all whom he encounters. I met him and was struck with the notion that I wanted that joy. I wanted to be that icon of Christ that I experienced in him. I wanted that smile. I left the Village that week feeling that nothing could take me from the Ark. I left committed, in the sentiments of my own patron, St. Seraphim of Sarov, to acquiring a Spirit of peace that it might transform the world. I was charged. I was committed. Could anything really be tempting enough to dangle even a single toe outside of the Ark?

Come the start of year two and the return to daily living. It didn’t take long to feel the tugs of the many things that the demons routinely place in my way to distract me. It didn’t take long to try to do this or to do that on my own, to forget for this moment or for that moment, that the Ark is a living body whose very breath is Christ Himself, a breath without which we die. Yet it is a breath that longs to give us life and life abundantly, if only we get out of the way, if only we nourish that breath with the treasures within the Ark – treasures that always point to nothing less than the love of God for man and the love to which man is called to return within himself and, in turn, to extend to all around him. For the Head of the Ark is Truth Himself, Jesus Christ, apart from Whom we are merely another set of ideas and, God forbid, rules. By God’s grace and the wisdom of our mentors, I tell you candidly that the selected readings for this program have nourished my soul, ever pointing to the Ark, the Church, indeed to Christ! Father Joseph. I want to thank you personally, as your writings, ever guiding to a transformational relationship with the Savion, have since helped me to reach people in a time of great need and crisis.

Enter year two of residency. I was ready. I was serving in the altar – proof alone that God can quite literally use anyone. I even had a cassock and a reasonable beard. I looked the part. As I said, I was ready. Though God again knew in His wisdom how to shake me to my core. For within two days, the same demon of pride that stirred this confidence had me feeling that I was somehow out of place, that somehow the struggles of my daily life were unique and beyond God’s grace. God sent me, yet again, Bishop JOHN. In a single unsolicited invitation to go for a walk, the week turned on a dime. During that walk I told His Grace that I felt out of place amongst all of these men and women “who had their lives together.” In his loving, yet convicting, pastoral manner he looked directly into my soul and said words I will never forget, received into the Faith, can be present to share in the joy of this evening. May we all give glory to God for the expansion of His Church, for this gathering, and indeed for all things!

My fellow graduating classmates, I thank God for each of you and for the inspiration you have been to me over the past three years. I pray that my sentiments tonight in some way reflect the joy and gratitude I am certain we all share. To those here present who are closer to the start of their studies, I pray I can give you a glimpse of the treasure you are given in this sacred House of Studies and in the holy people who serve therein.

As I reflect on the past three years, I cannot help but begin with two vivid memories of the first year of residency. Firstly, the week began with not only a charge, but also a poignant reminder of the great gift that is the Church. Here, I thank you, Your Grace Bishop THOMAS, for reminding us that we are indeed in the Ark and that in the Ark we must remain if our ministry, whatever it may be, is to be of value to our souls or to that of anyone else. Briefly, Sayidna, I apologize for standing during some of your classes. I meant no disrespect, but to the contrary, I stood before you with the deepest respect and with the excitement of a child. I am reminded here of the image of students gathered around Fr. Georges Florovsky, being spoon-fed by his wisdom. This is the experience you impart to us when you teach. You are truly the consummate pastor. Returning to the notion of the Ark, we were further reminded that within the Ark is not a religion, but rather a way a life, an incarnational reality that is capable of transforming the cosmos, if we earnestly live within Her boundaries.

The second memory, which is inseparably linked to the first, is that of a smile: the contagious smile of an international student and priest who was, at the time, serving Divine Liturgy in his garage. His smile unmistakably point to nothing less than the love of God for man and the love to which man is called to return within himself and, in turn, to extend to all around him. For the Head of the Ark is Truth Himself, Jesus Christ, apart from Whom we are merely another set of ideas and, God forbid, rules. By God’s grace and the wisdom of our mentors, I tell you candidly that the selected readings for this program have nourished my soul, ever pointing to the Ark, the Church, indeed to Christ! Father Joseph. I want to thank you personally, as your writings, ever guiding to a transformational relationship with the Savion, have since helped me to reach people in a time of great need and crisis.

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THOMAS, namely, that we live and breathe and function within a hospital for the sick, a hospital for sinners? We also live and breathe and function in a world that is hungry for love. We encounter hearts every day that seek the authentic, the hearts of individuals who are longing to be met and accepted where they are. Yet the love of God does not desire to leave them there. He desires that we, acting as His stewards, allow them the experience of salvation, of unconditional love here and now. In this way, may they and we be continually transformed into the likeness of the Creator. If we do not answer this call, all the “Ps and P-s” we have received during our studies are for naught. We have been equipped and we have been called. No matter what we do when we leave the Village, the call is the same. In the words of one modern theologian, “God has called us, not to the modern heaven of repose and sleep, but to the full and deifying glory of the sons of God!” In all that we have experienced, through book, lecture and exam, chant (in my case, atypical chant), through interaction, through prayer and Divine Services, may God grant that we answer the call in earnest.

JEREMIAH VOLLMAN

I have been afforded the honor of sharing a few thoughts as a representative of those of us who are graduating from the Applied Theology program this week. I hope to reflect concisely on some of the principles and themes; and I hope that you find them to be consistent with your experience as a student.

I have been here for two consecutive weeks; so I would like to begin by asking forgiveness of those who have been stuck with me this whole time – please forgive me for any and all offenses. It has been a joy to be with you; I hope that in some way I have conveyed the love of Christ to you, as you have to me. Next I would like to express gratitude: thank you to our administrators (Fr. Joseph, Archdeacon Peter, Cherri, and Mary), to our most capable instructors, and to the Anthanidion Village staff. Our Fathers in Christ Sayidna JOHN, Sayidna NICHOLAS – and Sayidna THOMAS (who was here last week) – thank you for your loving leadership and living example of “applied theology.” It has been a gift to us to be able to spend time with you, to get to know you personally.

We have undertaken a course of study in Applied Theology. This kind of study doesn’t simply connote the application of language and concepts to paper, but really the offering of life to lives, the offering of person (or, self) to persons (or, others). What we seek first is not to write papers, but to be written upon with the Spirit of the living God. (You are a letter of Christ … written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts”; 2 Corinthians 3.) Through the course of our study and guided projects it has been emphasized repeatedly that our goal is the experience of union; our theology is not a matter of abstraction (though it may seem abstract at times). The famous statement of St. Athanasius reflects this: “God became man, so that man might become god.” We strive to imitate God rather than to know about God – this is the theological endeavor, most truly. One of my favorite quotes, attributed to St. Isaac the Syrian, is this: “I do not desire to count milestones, but to enter the marriage chamber.” (Cherri, this doesn’t mean that I don’t want my certificate of completion….) Intimacy by way of union with God is our goal.

Theology and anthropology (our understanding of what it means to be human) are necessarily bound together. The latter cannot exist without the former, especially in light of the incarnation. The very Logos united himself with humanity to become the Theanthropos (the God-Man), that all humanity – and creation, we might add – may return to its natural state. Our theology and anthropology are inextricably bound to one another precisely by the reality of love, as love is the communion of persons. The ability both to give and to receive, is the constant and unending reciprocal exchange of selves, one with the other. This is at the heart of our effort, of the Christian life. I hope that love, the eternal virtue, will remain our constant motive, in that “God is love.” My prayer is that true love will be both our source and our goal, our means and our end.

We have learned that experience is prerequisite to leadership. We cannot lead others where we ourselves have not been. Some experience of entry into the mystery of the Holy Trinity is necessary; it is necessary to have embarked upon the healing journey of salvation. So by the grace of God – which is his very presence in our lives – may we become effective workers in the vineyard. I conclude with a couple of quotations. In the beautiful words of Fr. Joseph Antypas, “Our goal is not to harvest, but to sow.” Also, in the words of our Metropolitan JOSEPH: “If you desire to grow in your relationship with God, fall on your knees in repentance, then stand up and get to work: we have much to do.”

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

ST. STEPHEN’S CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The most popular program of the House of Studies offers a certificate in Orthodox Theology. This intensive three-year course is for laymen or clergy interested in a rigorous introduction to Orthodox faith and practice. Anyone with a high school diploma may apply. Some students are in college; some already have received their Bachelor’s degree. Many St. Stephen’s Certificate students already have advanced degrees (M.A., M.D., Ph.D.) but want a masters-level education without the master’s thesis itself.

WHAT IT IS

This three-year, directed-reading course immerses students in Eastern Orthodox theology, history, and spirituality through intensive reading, writing, directed
“IF YOU DESIRE TO GROW IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, FALL ON YOUR KNEES IN REPENTANCE, THEN STAND UP AND GET TO WORK: WE HAVE MUCH TO DO.”

The St. Stephen’s course is self-directed. This means the student is in control of his or her time-commitment. Most students are full-time professionals, teachers, students, or parents, and they are able to gain graduate-level formal education in Orthodox Theology during their evenings, weekends, and blocks of free time. Furthermore, St. Stephen’s is ideal for music directors, youth ministers, and artists.

While all St. Stephen’s students study the same core courses in Theology, each may choose to supplement their theological reading with one of three “tracks”: Iconology, Musicology, or Youth Ministry. These tracks provide specific preparation for the study or practice of iconography, for service as a choir director or chanter, or for ministry in camps, youth groups, and classrooms.

HOW IT WORKS

The St. Stephen’s Certificate of Orthodox Theology has four components: a. intensive reading; b. substantive writing; c. active directed ministry project; and d. yearly residency. Each year includes all four components, to varying degrees. Accepted students receive the syllabus, course goals and requirements, bibliography, and reading lists for all six units.

In detail, these components consist of 1. Guided Reading Unit (x 6 total – 1 per semester); 2. Written Examinations (x 6 total – 1 per semester); 3. Directed Project (x 3 total – 1 per year); and 4. Residency (x 3 total – 1 per year).

1. Guided Reading: The coursework covers six semesters (or “units”) of material over the course of three years. Each unit of coursework covers two to three sections on topics (such as the Fundamentals of Orthodoxy, Liturgical Theology, Pastoral Theology, Church History, Patristics, and Canon Law).

2. Written Examinations: Examinations take the form of research papers. Students receive a grade of P or F (pass with distinction) and P- (pass, below average). Master’s students receive the syllabus, course goals and requirements, bibliography, and reading lists for all six units.

3. Directed Project: Students must complete three ministerial projects, one per year. These are co-ordinated by the local pastor or director and Fr. George Kevorkian. They are aimed at practical leadership within a parish church school, youth group, choir, adult education group, or among senior citizens, at retreats, and so forth.

4. Residency: For one week each summer, students travel to the Antiochian Village near Ligonier, PA, to attend the Antiochian House of Studies Residency program. This Residency consists of a fast-paced series of lectures, workshops, and discussions, and must be completed to fulfill the requirements of the certificate. After a successful three years of course work, the student receives the St. Stephen’s Certificate of Theology from the House of Studies.

ST. STEPHEN’S M.A. PROGRAM — WHAT IT IS

The St. Stephen’s Master of Arts Program offers an accredited graduate degree in Applied Orthodox Theology. This course is designed for those interested in rigorous graduate education in theology. Many St. Stephen’s graduates desire further doctoral education, but need masters-level training. It is the perfect option for students who want a master’s degree, either for teaching, ministry, or personal enrichment.

The M.A. Thesis Program is conducted under the auspices of Balamand University, Lebanon. Balamand University grants successful students a Master of Arts in Applied Orthodox Theology in the Eastern Christian Tradition. The degree is administered in the U.S. by the Antiochian House of Studies and accredited by the Republic of Lebanon, under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

Completion of the House of Studies programs does not guarantee ordination. In the Fall of 1993, Metropolitan PHILIP of Antioch declared that a St. Stephen Certificate or Master’s is necessary; but may not be sufficient, for major ordination in the Antiochian Archdiocese.

HOW IT WORKS

Examinations take the form of open-book research papers. Students receive a grade of P or F (pass with fail), though the grading scheme includes P+ (pass with distinction) and P- (pass, below average). Master’s students...
are not permitted any failures on coursework, however, Certificate students are permitted up to two failures.

DIRECTED PROJECTS

Students must complete three ministerial projects. These are co-ordinated by the local pastor or director and Fr. George Kevorkian, aimed at practical leadership within a parish church school, youth group, choir, adult education group, among senior citizens, at retreats, and so forth.

PH.D. PROGRAM IN ORTHODOX STUDIES

The Antiochian House of Studies, a department of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, is pleased to announce the establishment of the Ph.D. program in Orthodox Studies. His Eminence the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joseph, Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, heartily approves and blesses this pioneering initiative.

As the first such Antiochian Orthodox program set within the English-speaking context in North America, the Ph.D. program is intended to train specialists in Biblical and Patristic Theology, with the specific aim of transmitting the wisdom and ethos of the Orthodox tradition to our theologians, educators and pastors.

In its mission to fulfill the ancient apostolic calling to build up Christian theological education, the Antiochian House of Studies is led by a team of renowned theologians, educators and pastors.

The faculty of the House of Studies is of the conviction that the Ph.D. program in Orthodox Studies will contribute most significantly to fostering a deeper conviction that the Ph.D. program in Orthodox Studies is a 48-credit curriculum of guided readings, written essay-style examinations, residency units, and supervised clinical practicum. This curriculum offers clergy and select lay persons who are living on limited budgets a unique opportunity to receive further education in techniques and theories from the behavioral sciences in a way that can be immediately integrated with Orthodox pastoral theology. Seasoned Orthodox clinicians and pastoral counselors help students to process their experiences. All students will be eligible, upon completion of the program, to apply for board certification in pastoral counseling with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC).

The program requires four residency weeks: one before the first semester of reading, and one after each of the three years of coursework. During these residency weeks, students will have the opportunity to gain counseling skills through group process enactments, role play, skills development training, and individual and dyadic supervision of case studies from their work in their local ministry setting.

In order to become a candidate for the Master of Arts degree and to enroll in the thesis portion of the program, the student must have completed the three-year reading curriculum in full, with no course failures. A bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited college or university is also required as a pre-requisite. The Master of Arts degree is granted in partnership with the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand, and is internationally accredited by the Commission for Higher Learning, Republic of Lebanon.

ST. STEPHEN’S YOUTH MINISTRY CONCENTRATION

The St. Stephen’s Program is a graduate-level, directed-reading course of studies in Applied Orthodox Theology. Successful completion of the program leads to a Diploma (or Master of Arts degree if the student is accepted to write a thesis) in Applied Orthodox Theology. Applicants from the Antiochian Archdiocese may be eligible for the SOYO Metropolitan PHILIP Youth Worker Scholarship.

The Youth Ministry concentration in the St. Stephen’s Program is comprised of fifteen directed-reading courses, three projects, and three weeks of residency (one week each year). Each entering class completes the coursework, projects, and residency on the same trimester schedule (two long sessions and one residency) during the course of the Program. Each Full session includes three directed-reading courses, each Spring session includes two reading courses and one directed-project course; and each Summer session includes one week of residency in the Antiochian House of Studies.

PASTORAL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNSELING CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

This program is a two-year training program for clergy, parish staff or Christian Education persons, each having a Master of Divinity degree or diploma through the House of Studies and three years’ parish experience. It is designed to prepare parish staff in counseling individuals, couples, and families in the parish and larger community.

The program is offered in two-week modules (five days each, twice a year (May and August/September)). Courses include the following: Foundations of Marriage and Family Counseling; Christian Anthropology and Human Development in the Family Life Cycle; Pastoral Care and Professional Ethics; Pastoral Counseling: Skills and Models; Pastoral Marriage Counseling; Pastoral Family Counseling; Psychopathology; and a Marriage and Family Counseling Practicum.

MASTER OF ARTS IN PASTORAL COUNSELING WHAT IT IS

The Master of Arts in Pastoral Counseling (MAPC) Program is a 48-credit curriculum of guided readings, written essay-style examinations, residency units, and 550-hour clinical practicum. This curriculum offers clergy and select lay persons who are living on limited budgets a unique opportunity to receive further education in techniques and theories from the behavioral sciences in a way that can be immediately integrated with Orthodox pastoral theology. Seasoned Orthodox clinicians and pastoral counselors help students to process their experiences. All students will be eligible, upon completion of the program, to apply for board certification in pastoral counseling with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC).

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM

Accredited through Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, the Doctor of Ministry program offers working ministers a chance to deepen their knowledge and widen their impact. This program is open to those who have already been serving for at least two years in full-time minis- try. The D.Min. program consists of coursework taken on-site in ministry, ecclesiology, canon law, homiletics, spirituality and pastoral care.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

KAVANAUGH, Deacon Peter, to the priesthood by Bishop JOHN on January 3, 2016, at St. Pat- rick Church, Bealton, Virginia. He is assigned to the parsonage of St. Benedict of Nursia Church, Wichita Falls, Texas, effective January 15, 2016.

MAHFOUZ, Deacon John, to the priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 13, 2015, at Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Salt Lake City, Utah.

RETIRED

ROONEY, Archpriest James, from the pastoralate of St. Benedict of Nursia Church, Wichita Falls, Texas, effective January 15, 2016.

REPOSED

PETERS, Priest Richard, 78, of Williamston, Michigan. Father Richard is survived by his wife of fifty-eight years; by their three children: Margo (David) Sinkowitch, Jason (Kristin), and Calvin; by their grandchildren: Emma, Dietrich, Jakob, and Wyatt; and by his brothers: Leonard (Marilyn) and Dean (Carlton), both of Eaton Rapids.

HODGE, Archdeacon Russell, 89, of St. George Church in West St. Paul, Minnesota. He is survived by his wife, Shamaisy Phyllis, and their son, Father Paul Hodge, and his family.
Metropolitan JOSEPH Addresses the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

HIS EMINENCE’S REMARKS TO THE FALL MEETING IN VAN NUYS, CALIFORNIA, OCTOBER 2015

It is with great joy that I greet all of you, as we gather to do the work of the Church in our capacity as members of the Board of Trustees. I wish to begin with a small meditation which deals with our call to service.

We read in the Book of Romans the following:

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching” (Romans 12:4–7).

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome those members who are attending their first Board of Trustees meeting. Elected to the Board and attending their first meeting are Mr. Rami Younes and Ms. Darlene Haddad. Appointed to the Board and attending their first meeting are Mrs. Kelli Kouri Neagle and Mr. Richard Ayoub.

Many important events have taken place since we were last together in Boston at the Archdiocese Convention in July. Some of the highlights are as follows:

1. September 1–5; The 35th Anniversary of the Antiochian House of Studies at the Antiochian Village;
2. September 14; The Academic Convocation at St. Vladimir Seminary, where the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree was bestowed on both myself and Metropolitan TIKHON of the OCA;
3. September 15–17; The Fall meeting of the Assembly of Bishops in Chicago;
4. September 21; A meeting of the Archdiocese Investment Committee;
5. September 25; The meeting of the area bishops with Pope Francis at the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan; and

In early October, the Fall meeting of the Holy Synod of Antioch took place at the Balamand in Lebanon, but I was unable to attend on account of my very heavy schedule of visitations which had been previously scheduled.

I wish to say in the strongest terms possible that this body must become more active, and more effective. The Archdiocese has a body and soul, and I believe that the Board of Trustees is the soul of this Archdiocese. This requires us to be leaders in everything that we say and do. Although our work does have some attributes of a business, our work for the Church must have a spiritual basis, since we will be held accountable by the Lord for how we have managed His Church as good stewards.

All of us are doing our best to maintain the unity of this Archdiocese and not contribute to any fragmentation. Whether you are a member by election or appointment, you are participating in a ministry as a steward of this Archdiocese. This is why we must begin with prayer, ask for forgiveness, and use our conscience and all of our moral values in order to guarantee the success of what we are doing. You have been given this ministry by God as a gift, and your work is for Him, not for me or anyone else. This gift is not given to us for prestige or honor, but so that we might labor and plant seeds. God will cause these seeds to grow and will reward us. We must never participate in the spreading of gossip or rumors which can be very damaging. On the contrary, we must be the ones who refuse to listen to gossip and rumors, and who ask others to stop if they are spreading this talk.

It is very important to note that we have an obligation to keep every discussion which we have in these meetings strictly private, and not discuss them with anyone. Any violation of this privacy will be greatly upsetting to me and will require a private discussion to understand the motivation. Politics has no place in this body, since we are all working for the same goals. Let us join together, and work together with love, humility and dignity to glorify the Name of God. With fifty members on this Board, and with the powerful skills that you all have, we should be able to work miracles.

Allow me to comment on the recent visit of our Father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X. It is very important that we recognize and acknowledge the true relationship of this Archdiocese to the Mother Church of Antioch which is both historical and spiritual. Let me say this simply – if there is no presence of Christians in the Middle East, then this Archdiocese, and every other Archdiocese will lose its spiritual and historical connection. If there is not a strong and unshakable unity between the Church of Antioch in the Middle East and this Archdiocese, then this Archdiocese has no canonical standing. As recently as five years ago, it would have been unthinkable to speak of the presence of Christians in the Middle East as being in jeopardy. Unfortunately, the current situation threatens the very presence of Christians in that region, and it requires us to stand in...
Board of Trustees

solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering so greatly. In light of the magnitude of the tragedy which is unfolding before us, we must ask the question: “Are we doing enough?”

“I WISH TO SAY IN THE STRONGEST TERMS POSSIBLE THAT THIS BODY MUST BECOME MORE ACTIVE, AND MORE EFFECTIVE. THE ARCHDIOCESE HAS A BODY AND SOUL, AND I BELIEVE THAT THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IS THE SOUL OF THIS ARCHDIOCESE.”

The presence of our Patriarch is not a minor thing for this Archdiocese, but a great blessing. If there is important information to be given regarding the visit of the Patriarch which includes the purpose for his visit, then the Metropolitan will be the source for giving that information. No good purpose can be served by having anyone spreading gossip or rumors, which is not the Christian way. He is our Father in Christ and his presence and teaching is a great honor and blessing for all of us. He does not come here to collect money, nor does he come here to move the Patriarchate from Damascus to the United States, as some were speculating. The See of Antioch has suffered persecutions for her entire history, even forcing the Patriarchate to move from Antioch to Damascus in the 14th century. Despite these many persecutions, the See of Antioch has survived and prospered to this day. I will invite His Beatitude here again and again, so that he can lift us up and inspire us spiritually. It is a normal thing for the father to be with his children. It may be that we are not accustomed to frequent visits by the Patriarch, but this will change.

As I have previously said to all of you, we need to form groups of members according to your skills, expertise, and knowledge. Currently, we have defined four major categories, and I ask for your input and feedback:

- Finance, Banking, and Investments
- Attorney/Legal Professional
- Physician, Dentist, Psychologist/Counselor
- Business Owner

Working as teams within these categories we can generate ideas on how to enrich and expand this Archdiocese in many ways. All of these ideas can be discussed in smaller groups and developed, and then brought to the general meeting for discussion and decisions. In this way each of you will be given an opportunity to prove himself or herself as an enthusiastic and effective contributor, with every chance to express positive ideas that bear fruit. People have asked me why we even need a Board of Trustees, who the members are, and what they do. Let your actions and the good fruit which result from these actions be the powerful answer to these questions.

Metropolitan JOSEPH welcomed the newly elected and appointed members of the Board of Trustees, Rami Younes, Darlene Haddad, Kellie Khouri Nagieh and Richard Ayoub. Much of the meeting focused on the crises in the Middle East and the response of our Archdiocese. Metropolitan JOSEPH stressed the close relationship we have with our Mother Church and our desire to support her as much as possible in these trying times. To date, much of our efforts have centered in Los Angeles and Canada, where more refugees have arrived. Many communities in the United States have been active as well, meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees as well as raising humanitarian aid which has been sent directly to the Patriarchate and through the IOCC. To act as a coordinating committee to lead our efforts, Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed a committee of Board of Trustee members, including Committee Chairman Daniel Abrah- ham, Fr. Thomas Zain, Khalil Kardous, Elias Shaheen, Dimitri Zeidan and Salim Abboud.

Metropolitan JOSEPH outlined his plan for the Board of Trustees. He stressed that the Board must become more active and effective, because it is the “soul of the Archdiocese.” While the Board may have some of the characteristics of a business, it must always have a spiritual basis, as it is accountable to the Lord for its stewardship. All members must work to maintain the unity of the Archdiocese while serving as stewards. He stressed the dangers of gossip and church politics. We are joined together with love, humility and dignity to glorify the name of God. When we work together, God will perform miracles in our presence. Metropolitan JOSEPH also reflected on the wonderful time we had with Patriarch JOHN X during his time with us, including the Archdiocese Convention. We look forward to having the Patriarch with us for future Conventions.

Fathers Michel Najim and Patrick O’Grady reported on the Antiochian Orthodox Institute. The Institute will emphasize the Antiochian ethos and supplement the education of our clergy. It will support the Ph.D. program of the Balзам University for the American students and will also undertake the translation and publication of liturgical texts and related materials for parish use. This institute is an important effort of our Archdiocese and will require funding. Two full-time clerics, an administrative assistant and a small staff are anticipated. A building is purchased and plans for the building modifications necessary for the work to be done are underway.

Fr. Anthony Gabriel reported on the work of the Antiochian Heritage Foundation, which will be working to meet the needs of the Antiochian Institute as well as the Archdiocese.

Salim Abboud offered a warm tribute to his predecessor, Robert Laham, thanking him for all of the work done in the past as well as for his trust and confidence. Bob later praised Salim for the detailed and comprehensive work that Salim is doing. Salim outlined for the Board the policies and practices which had been recommended by an outside audit team, and explained how they were being put into practice. He reviewed the financial report line by line. Salim also introduced Fr. Michael Tassos and provided a brief resume for Fr. Tassos, Sameh Khousam, and Vojtek Potorski, Sandra Abdelmessih Massih, and Marlene Ayoub, who constitute the Archdiocesan financial team.

Salim Abboud announced new initiatives, including plans to review all outstanding parish assessments, build an Archdiocesan balance sheet, review all brokerage accounts, meet with each department head, create standard expense/reimbursement forms, establish stronger internal controls and segregation of duties, perform annual audits, review giving policies, coordinate with the Antiochian Village, close the books on a calendar year, create a scanning system for the sacramental certificates and create an insurance committee with one board member from each diocese.

The board heard reports about the Conference Center, the camping programs, the Youth Department, the organizations, the Convoy of St. Thelma, the Missions Department, the Convention Planning Department, and clergy retirement and insurances. Plans for a cemetery, mausoleum and chapel at the Antiochian Village are progressing.

The Spring meeting will be held at the Antiochian Village on June 25, 2016.
Confession: A Mystery of the Church

Very Rev. Paul O’Callaghan


If we were to list common questions that laypeople have about confession, the list could go on and on. How often must one confess? Why is it necessary to confess to a priest? Is it necessary to have confession before communion? When is it necessary to go to confession? Why can’t you just confess your sins to God privately? What if you don’t know what to confess? What if you forget some sins when you make a confession? Indeed, we could go on and on.

We will not try to address all such questions in this article. However, we will try to dispel some of the basic “mysteries” that seem to surround the practice of confession and show its importance for the life of a faithful Orthodox Christian. We will begin by looking at the fundamental elements of the sacrament as they developed in the life of the Church.

The most basic aspect of confession is that it is the sacrament of reconciliation. In the early centuries of the Church, most baptisms were of adult converts from paganism. These converts understood that baptism granted them the full remission of all the sins of their previous life. Baptism also represented a death to the old life of sin and the rebirth into the new life of Christ (see Romans 6). Baptism was an act whereby one committed one’s life to the discipleship of Jesus Christ. It was a decisive break with the life of sin and disobedience. What happened, then, when a baptized person fell into serious sin? Could such sin after baptism be forgiven? If so, how?

Controversies raged in the second and third centuries about these questions. The Church rejected the position that serious sin committed after (adult) baptism could not be forgiven, and those who held it (Novatians, Donatists) fell into schism.

Yet how could serious sins be forgiven? Both the Orthodox and the extreme rigorists held that certain sins were so devastating that they cut one off from the life of Christ, thus automatically affecting excommunication. All agreed that idolatry, murder, and adultery had this effect. Additionally, it was agreed that those sins listed by the Apostle Paul as preventing one’s entry into the kingdom produced the same result (see 1 Corinthians 6). Those who committed them were automatically excommunicated and cut off from life in Christ, which is the Church. The earliest form of confession, then, was a rite by which the Church acknowledged that a certain person had fulfilled the penie for his sin, possessed sincere repentance, and was to be re-admitted to the life of the faithful and allowed to receive communion again. Confession was handled in a much more public, open manner as an individual acknowledged his sin and was re-admitted to the assembly of the faithful.

The first and most basic meaning of confession, then, is the act of restoring and reconciling one guilty of serious sin to the body of Christ, the Church. This is why confession is mandatory in cases of adultery, fornication, homosexuality acts, murder, abortion, causing grave physical harm to another, thievery, false witness, and other serious sins. These sins cut one off from the body of Christ, and one must be formally restored to the body. It is not enough in these situations to simply confess to God and tell Him one is sorry. Excommunication has taken place, even if the person acknowledges his sin and continues to receive communion. The only way excommunication is lifted is when the sinner is restored and reconciled by the rite of confession.

In the modern era, as we know, confession is conducted much more privately between the priest and the penitent. This is unfortunate in some respects, because the sense of being publicly restored to the church community is much less tangible than when the community witnessed the act. Nevertheless, the fundamental meaning is the same: it is an act of reconciliation.

The early canons prescribe that a Christian who stays away from the Liturgy for three Sundays in a row is automatically excommunicated. This is a little-known fact among many contemporary Orthodox. Actually, the canons stipulate this for anyone who does not partake of Holy Communion, but of course, by extension, it is true of those who skip Liturgy.

This is why, in addition to the serious sins listed above, a person must receive confession if he has failed to attend Liturgy on Sunday for a period of several weeks without serious reason. (Obviously, illness, travel, injury, and so forth, do not effect excommunication). It is an abuse and a sacrilege when one disdains the Holy Liturgy by non-attendance due to sheer carelessness, and then receives communion the next time he attends. A person who has not been faithful in attending the Divine Liturgy must be restored by receiving confession before approaching the chalice.

The first things that happen in confession actually happen before one enters the church and approaches the priest to confess. This is because one first must come to the conclusion that “I need to go to confession.” How does this occur?

There are two ways. In one, a person comes under the conviction of sin. He realizes, “I have sinned and need to go to confession.” He clearly senses that he has failed before God, broken his commandments, offended him, and perhaps hurt another person. This sense of conviction arises in the conscience under the influence of the Holy Spirit. At such times, one knows that one stands guilty before God and needs His forgiveness. It is unmistakable. He is grieved at the thought of what he has done. He knows that there is no other way to be free from the burden of his sin other than to acknowledge it, repent of it, and resolve not to commit it again. To complete this process, he needs the help of God’s grace, and so he approaches the sacrament of confession as a penitent seeking absolution.

The other way a person comes to sense his need for confession is by examination of conscience. In this case, someone is not immediately aware of the fact that he has sinned against God and needs forgiveness. He knows, however, that a Christian must regularly review his conduct in the light of God’s commandments. So he takes time to examine himself and conduct a moral inventory of his behavior. This review then points up to him his failures and the need for repentance and confession, and so he resolves to approach the sacrament for the healing of his soul.

If one does not have an immediate and unmistakable sense of conviction of sin, then it is necessary to prepare for confession by examination of conscience. This is best achieved by taking the little paperback, Pocket Prayer Book and reviewing the section on “Self-Examination.”
Confession

Confession is a subject of much confusion in the Orthodox world today. In some places and jurisdictions, it is considered necessary to make one’s confession each time one is to receive communion. In other places, confession is hardly practiced at all. At seminary, I met the daughter of an Orthodox priest who had not been to confession once in her entire life.

In addition to the confusion about confession itself, there are a wide variety of ideas about the role of the priest in confession and the relationship to a “spiritual father.” Although precise distinctions cannot always be made, let us consider some basic guidelines which will help us understand this relationship.

Who can hear confessions? We will begin by stating in this way: a priest, that is, a priest or bishop. Deacons may not hear confessions or grant absolution. There is a tradition in the Orthodox Church, however, of lay monks hearing confessions. Where a special gift from God enables a monk to do so, the correct practice is for the monk to hear the confession, but always to refer the penitent to a priest for absolution. Why? A lay monk does not have the ability to grant absolution, since this grace is only given to those who are ordained by the laying on of hands in the apostolic succession.

Are all priests able to hear confessions? Well, yes and no. By ordination, a priest is given the authority and the potential grace to officiate at all the holy mysteries. The bishop, however, must grant the actual authority to do so to each priest. This is called a “faculty.” Some priests, but not necessarily all, are granted the “faculty” of hearing confessions. In our Antiochian jurisdiction, as others, a priest may be invested with the faculty of hearing confessions upon ordination or when the bishop determines. In the Churches of Greece, some parish priests do not normally hear confessions at all. Certain other priests who are known as “confessors,” travel from parish to parish to hear confessions. Thus confessors are invested by their bishop with this faculty, while typical parish priests may not be.

In current practice, one generally may confess to any priest. For instance, “confessions” are usually offered at regional conferences. Or perhaps one visits a monastery and wishes to have one’s confession heard. In such cases, one simply makes a confession to a priest who is not necessarily one’s pastor, confessor, or spiritual father. Of course, one cannot do so to circumvent the relationship with one’s pastor, confessor, or spiritual father.

The usual practice in modern American parishes is for a person to confess to his pastor, that is, the priest of the parish to which he belongs. This is based on the fact that every parishioner is entrusted to the spiritual care of his pastor. One of the ways that care is extended is through the parishioner’s relationship to the parish priest. A parishioner may be instructed in her spiritual life by her pastor, but the priest may also serve as her confessor. In this capacity, the priest is given the authority to hear the confession of the parishioner, but only if he is the parish priest. If he is not, then the priest is said to be one’s “confessor.” A confessor may be one’s pastor or not. When one has a confessor, one has a specifically designated person to whom one is accountable for one’s spiritual life.

A different, more formal, and more obliging relationship is entered into when one makes the request that a priest be one’s confessor. A confessor may be one’s pastor or not. When one has a confessor, one commits to confess regu-

We hear much in the Orthodox world today about the necessity for “spiritual fathers,” confessors, and the like. It is important to have a basic understanding of what these relationships are all about. Whether one confesses simply to a priest or to one’s pastor, or has a confessor or a true spiritual father, one must be knowledgeable about the sacrament of confession, the relationship he is entering into, and the person to whom one confesses. Only then will the potential for abuse and misunderstanding be countered, and the grace of the sacrament flourish to the spiritual profit of the penitent.
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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Welcome to the Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity**

**Author:** Frederica Mathewes-Green

Of the several books that provide introductions to the Orthodox Church, **Welcome to the Orthodox Church** is unique. The format and presentation, as well as the content, make it worthy of consideration. The additional presenter materials are a definite plus.

The index shows that the book contains the basics of an introduction to the faith, but we also find unusual entries: assurance of salvation, divorce, and other topics likely to be raised by inquirers. Issues likely to arise for Western Christians and converts are brought to the fore, and Frederica addresses these in a sensible, Orthodox manner. The book is comprised of three parts: Inside the Temple, Inside the Liturgy, and Inside the Community. Frederica begins with a tour of a fictional Orthodox Church, and along the way unfolds a large amount of Orthodox history and theology, using the icons and architecture as touchstones. When Frederica invites the reader to Liturgy, we meet the priest, deacon and some of the parishioners. As the services proceeds she explains the theology underlying the texts and hymns.

Frederica takes us into the community with the parishioners we meet earlier. In this section, a remarkable array of Orthodox beliefs and practices are explained: from sacraments, to how Orthodox agree and disagree. Most of these are presented in vignettes as we learn about the lives of the faithful. Frederica writes, first and foremost, as a narrator. There is no pressure, and no attempt to impress. Although she is versed in Orthodox theology, her intent is to describe an experience. She uses analogies to make even the most difficult concept readily understandable. Her manner is engaging, and enthusiastic.

Paradigm Press has augmented her presentation for Adult Education leaders by providing two valuable PDF documents on their website. The first is an eight-page “Outline” that breaks out the Table of Contents in detail. The second text presents “Discussion Questions” for every chapter. In addition, on YouTube, Frederica is constructing a series titled, “Theoria,” based on her book. There are 17 installments of approximately 10 minutes each.

**Welcome to the Orthodox Church** is published by Paradigm Press, 2015, 386 pp. Paperback, $19.99.

**REPTENCE: INVITATION TO NEW LIFE**

Carole Buleza

Orthodox Christians know that Great Lent is a time for repentance. One aspect of repentance is looking seriously at our lives and preparing to meet with Christ at the sacrament of Confession. Fr. John Chrysavgis, in *Repentance and Confession* (Holy Cross Press, 1990) has written a book that provides insights worth exploring.

Orthodox Christians are people of the Resurrection, or so we are told, yet often the question must be asked, “Where is the joy?” One response upon reading Fr. Chrysavgis’s work is, “In repentance!” A wonderful point brought up by Fr. Chrysavgis begins to unfold the joy of repentance. He explains that it is not mechanical and unfeeling, nor is it a legal transaction. Rather, repentance is a continual enactment of freedom, a movement forward, deriving from renewed choice and leading to restoration. It is an invitation to new life, an opening up of new horizons, the gaining of a new vision.

A “continual enactment of freedom” – the idea fits well with the conception of Orthodoxy as life-giving. Repentance enacts the freedom of a conscience that is no longer burdened. Relationships that were damaged by self-centeredness, or other destructive sins can now be restored, because of repentance. Fr. Chrysavgis notes importantly that there is no place in repentance for any self-regard, as if to wallow in remorse. Repentance is about the positive act of renewed choice, about moving forward, and the opening up of new horizons.

**Confession Is New Life**

Like the paralytic who could not find anyone to take him to the water when it was stirred, people can live with a sin for years. The sin is holding them captive. With confession, they are victorious. New life awaits them, as this confessor explains to the penitent:

> Take heart, my son, without my saying anything, your confession has set you free from this captivity. Today you have won a victory over the adversary who had beaten you. Through your confession you have brought him down more completely than when you yourself were down as a result of that sinfulness which he had prompted. No word uttered by you or by anyone else had stopped him, and until now you had given him the whip-hand over you. . . .

> Now because of this open denunciation of him that most evil spirit will not be able to trouble you, and this most loathsome serpent will not take up a hiding place within you for he has been pulled out into the light from your shadowy heart by this saving confession of yours. (*Caenius, An Example of Confession, Conference 2*)

A sense of freedom pervades the scene set before us. It is easy to imagine a new horizon opening up before the eyes of this penitent.

**To Confess: “Exomologesis”**

Fr. Chrysavgis brought to light an additional insight for repentance by stating that the meaning of the words to
Orthodox Christian Fellowship’s College Conference 2015

Hundreds of college students gathered from December 28 to 31, 2015, for Orthodox Christian Fellowship’s two 2015 College Conferences, in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, and the Saint Nicholas Ranch, Dunlap, California. The theme this year was “Modern Martyrs: Witnesses of the Word.” Students discussed how they can be witnesses to Christ on their college campuses and in the secular world. They also participated in worship, service, and fellowship activities.

Three hundred and twenty students attended College Conference East, held at the Antonisch Village in Ligonier. Sister Vasa Larin, a nun belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) and liturgist for the University of Vienna, was the Keynote Speaker. Workshops were led by Rev. Fr. Timothy Hopiński (Orthodox Church in America, or OCA); Fr. Alexandros and Peri. Stephanie Petrides (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America); V. Rev. Fr. Stephen Loposky (American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the U.S.A.); Dr. Tim Parinas from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Louis Zagani, Development Officer for International Orthodox Christian Charities; and Stephen Christoforos, Director of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. His Grace Bishop GREGORY of Nyssa, Episcopal Liaison for OCF to the Assembly of Bishops and Rev. Fr. Joel Gillam (Antiochian), Spiritual Advisor for College Conference East, were also present. Anna Valliant, a senior at the University of Pittsburgh and College Conference East Student Leader said, “There is something so beautiful about 300 Orthodox students gathering together in prayer and fellowship to grow closer to Christ. OCF’s College Conference gave us an opportunity to broaden our knowledge about being a witness for our Faith, while allowing us to create and strengthen friendships with others.”

A little over sixty students attended College Conference West, held at the St. Nicholas Ranch. Rev. Fr. Apostolos Hill of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Phoenix, Arizona, was the Keynote Speaker and served as the Conference’s Spiritual Advisor. Workshops were led by Abbot Tryphon of the All Saints Merciful Servant Monastery, and author/podcaster of “The Morning Offering” (BCO; COR); Mother Melania, of Holy Assumption Monastery (OCA); Fr. Michael Gillis, author/podcaster of “Praying in the Rain (Antiochian); Mrs. Christina Andreasen, Manager of Chapter Relations for OCF and her husband, Mr. Dan Andreasen. Nora Haddad, a junior at Sacramento City College and College Conference West Student Leader, said, “The College Conference experience this year was unparalleled in that the love of Christ breathed through the union and companionship of all who attended! Glory to God, through prayer, education on martyrdom and saintliness, the sharing of our hearts with one another, and allowing love to conquer over all that arose in any given circumstance, we were able to witness transformation together from beginning to end. Everyone left OCF’s College Conference West with their hearts elated and eyes glimmering with inspiration!”

Department of Christian Education

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Students gathered for OCF’s College Conference East at Antiochian Village, December 28-31, 2015.
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New Years is a time for resolutions. For some of us it may be the one time each year we take a serious look at where we have been, and where we are going, in our lives. Hopefully we will find signs of progress and growth.

Undoubtedly, we will also be reflecting on the ways we have fallen short in the past year – missed opportunities, unrealized dreams, goals yet still out of reach, and broken promises made to ourselves or others. As we are human beings, these may touch upon physical, emotional, or relational issues; or financial, academic, or other goals.

Yet for us as Orthodox Christians, all of these are dwarfed by the one real, pressing, and ultimate goal of our existence: communion with the living God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is, as our Lord put it, “the one thing needful” for us (Luke 10:42).

All our resolutions ideally should relate to this single purpose and to real life. If we seek it, if we find it, all our resolutions will fall into place. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Practically speaking, how then do we do this? How can we begin to taste of this communion with God and with all the spiritual exploits. “Therefore, every akathist is dedicated to all missionary priests and their devoted followers who labor and sacrifice to plant the seeds of the true faith throughout North America and other English-speaking regions. Proceeds from this project will go toward our future church temple on property we have already purchased.

It is our hope that this book of akathists will be used in every parish Orthodox home for the edification and sanctification of the faithful and to the glory of God who is “wonderful in His Saints” (Psalm 67:36, Septuagint).

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Metropolitan JOSEPH Honors the Retiring Lebanese Ambassador

Remarks of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH on the Occasion of the Dinner Held at the Archdiocese Headquarters in Honor of His Excellency Antoine Chedid, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States, on the Occasion of His Retirement, January 8, 2016

Your Excellency Ambassador Chedid, Mrs. Chedid, Distinguished Ambassadors, Your Eminences, Your Grace, Reverend Fathers, Sheikh Merhi, and Honored Guests:

White me great pleasure this evening to host this wonderful dinner to honor a man who has dedicated his life to the pursuit of peace and stability for his native country of Lebanon. His Excellency Ambassador Antoine Chedid has truly pursued a career which has been filled with accomplishments that have earned him the respect of his countrymen, fellow diplomats, and all who have had the occasion to work with him.

He has served as the Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States for the past eight and a half years. Prior to that, he served as the Ambassador of Lebanon to Greece from 1998 until 2000, and as Consul General in Los Angeles, California, from 1984 to 1986, and in New York and the Eastern States from 1991 to 1998.

Yesterday I spoke with His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X by phone. He expressed his great joy for this gathering which recognizes the exemplary service of Ambassador Chedid. He asked that his love and respect be conveyed to Ambassador Chedid, and sends his congratulations for this well-deserved honor.

Antoine is well-regarded and loved by all of us, and was a good friend of my predecessor, the late Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory. Although his title is Ambassador, he is much more than that – he is a friend to everyone. In many ways, his ministry is like our own.

He has been welcomed to this Archdiocese headquarters many times, and we will welcome him here always, and hope that he considers this another home. We share the same family roots from Zahle, and we know that Zahle produces good fruit. Antoine is a shining example of what Zahle is. We congratulate you, your family, and your children on a job very well done. You and your family should be proud of all that you have accomplished during your exemplary service in Washington, and in the course of a broader career in the Foreign Ministry, dedicated to fostering strong relations with the United States. On behalf of this entire Archdiocese, the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful, and in recognition of your tireless and courageous service in pursuit of peace and stability, I bestow on Your Excellency Ambassador Antoine Chedid the highest honor which is awarded by this Archdiocese, the Order of St. Raphael. We congratulate you, your wife Nicole and your children on a job very well done. May God bless you all as you embark on the next phase of your lives.

May God bless America and Lebanon.
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- Jad, 13 years old

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