

THE WORD

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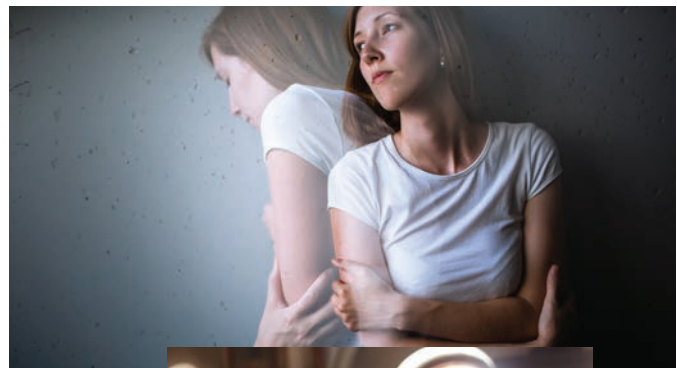


THE MIRACULOUS LADY

OF SAINT GEORGE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CICERO, ILLINOIS

THE WORD

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ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CICERO,
ILLINOIS

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Letters to the editor are welcome and should include the author's full name and parish. Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions e-mailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

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We All Began with God's Love

Bishop JOHN

There is a popular situation comedy which examines the complexities and humor of modern relationships in a group of young adults, called *The Big Bang Theory*. The show raises the question, "How did we all get to where we are today?" It's theme song reviews the history of the world to its beginnings in a "big bang." Although brilliant in its purpose and humor, the show's premise fails to go back far enough. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans *succeeds*, however. He opens his Letter to the Romans, the children of the Church far away from Jerusalem and Antioch, with a description of our current predicament, which began not in a "big bang," but in the love of God the Father for His only begotten Son, the love of the Son for the Father and God's Spirit, and the love of the Spirit for the Father and the Son.

Out of this love comes the sharing and multiplication of love in the creation of mankind and the world. All creation, by its very created nature,

should worship its Creator. Of course, it is not as though God *needs* man to worship Him, but man, like any creature, needs to worship. He or she needs to be in a right relationship with the Creator. To understand our primordial situation, we begin with God and His love. To understand this concept better, I quote Fr. Thomas Hopko's third talk on worship, found on Ancient Faith Radio's website.

To understand how this concept applies to us, Antiochian and Orthodox in America, I call your attention to a gem of our modern times: *Apostle to the Plains: Fr. Nikola Yanney*. In this impossible-to-put-down book produced by the Saint Raphael Clergy Brotherhood (and available from the Antiochian

We came not
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but ultimately
from the love of
the Holy Trinity.

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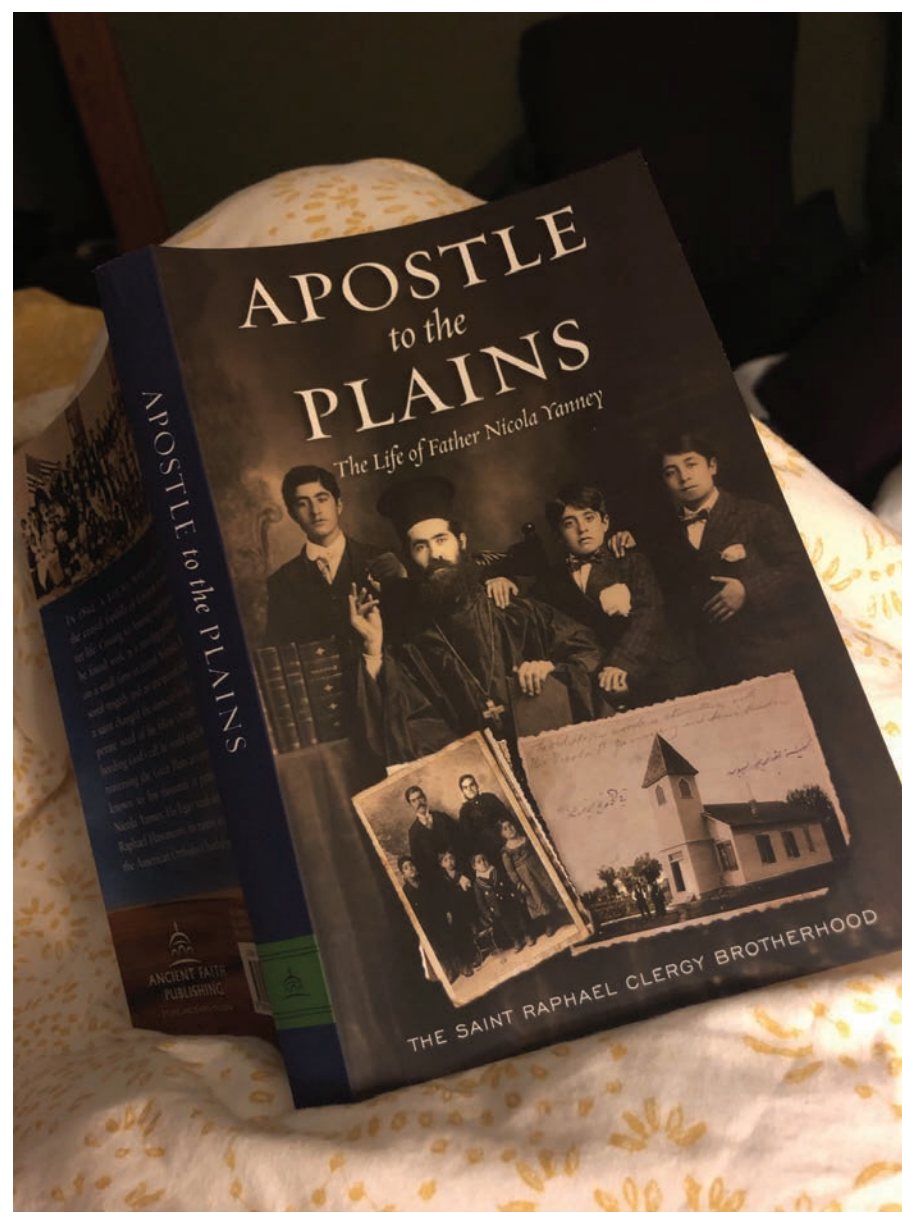
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Village bookstore, as well as Ancient Faith and most book-sellers), we read our story of how Antiochians left the lands of persecution by the Ottomans, and wound up in Nebraska and all over North and South America. Here we have a true narrative of Antiochian and American history. This book is an account of real Christians of modern times, struggling with the elements, personal tragedy, and the building of an Archdiocese and Orthodoxy on this continent. This book offers us not only a perspective on modern life, but a sensitive and concrete example of the theology of Saint Paul as expressed in Romans 1. Fr. Yanney followed God in faith from Lebanon to America, seeking the American dream of freedom, and, through losses, trials and hard work, he discovered God's tangible love. Building churches as a priest, he discovered God in the lives and pains of God's people, not in Rome or Damascus, but in the American relocation of many Antiochians."

It is said that to understand who you are, you need to understand where you come from. *Apostle to the Plains: Fr. Nikola Yanney* is a story of where we Antiochians in America came from, and is a must-read. We came not from a "big bang," but ultimately from the love of the Holy Trinity. This love compels us to seek the Kingdom of God and praise the life-giving Holy Trinity.



It's Going to Take an Army

WHAT EVERY
ADULT MUST KNOW
ABOUT TEENAGE
MENTAL HEALTH

Michelle Moujaes



THEODEN: "I WILL NOT RISK OPEN WAR."

ARAGORN: "OPEN WAR IS UPON YOU, WHETHER YOU WOULD RISK IT OR NOT."

— *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*

THIS IS WAR

Teenagers today are engaged in a constant battle for the very state of their mental health, and consequently, their physical and spiritual health as well. If we really want to support our teens in having good mental health, it's up to us, the adults in their lives, to link arms with them on the front lines. The fight is real. The road is hard. It's going to take an army to guide our children to the right path.

THE CRISIS: WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY UP AGAINST?

Our teenagers are grappling with questions and situations, that for the most part, they are not effectively equipped to address. Every day, many of their Orthodox Christian values related to person, identity, gender, and relationships are being questioned, mocked and marginalized. We live in a society overly saturated with sex, where intimacy has been distorted and marriage has been redefined. There is a growing disconnect between what society allows and encourages, and what the Church teaches as truth.

We need only to glance at any one of the mental health statistics available to see the impact this has on our youth. The statistics are overwhelming.

SUICIDE

Numbers from The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) tell us that by the time you finish reading this article, eight people from around the world will have successfully taken their own lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control, suicide is the tenth leading cause of death for all ages in the United States. The World Health Organization reports that nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the world each year. That's roughly one death every 40 seconds. Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people 15–24 years old.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

The statistics on other mental health struggles continue to be staggering as well. According to the NIMH, 32 percent of teenagers, ages 13–18, have an anxiety disorder.

The World Health Organization tells us 3.2 million adolescents ages 12–17 in the United States alone had at least one major depressive episode in 2017. That's over 13 percent of the U.S. population in that age range.

Currently, millions and millions of our young people are not only wrestling with suicidal ideation, anxiety, or depression, but struggling, too, with inflicting self-harm, eating disorders, substance abuse, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and loneliness. These are only some of a whole host of mental health issues facing young people today.

WHAT ABOUT CHURCH KIDS?

Church kids are not exempt from this crisis. This

past summer, I was asked to address The Order of St. Ignatius at the Archdiocese Convention. There, I reported that our team at Faithtree had surveyed clergy, lay leaders, and parents from Orthodox churches around the country regarding the mental health struggles of our youth. We had over 530 respondents. When we asked if our Orthodox youth struggled with anxiety, an overwhelming 97 percent reported that anxiety was a major issue for the young people in their parish. That's almost all of them! Moreover,

- 97 percent told us loneliness was a major issue;
- 94 percent reported their teens were struggling with depression;
- 74 percent admitted self-harm (meaning they physically cut or hurt themselves) was an issue;
- 68 percent of our responding clergy, youth workers and parents, said suicidal ideation, or in other words, thinking about or planning one's own suicide, was a major concern they had for their own children and the youth in their church.

If you still have any doubt that these numbers are correct, or if the struggles of this culture are impacting our Orthodox youth, I offer you (with a heavy heart) what I shared with members of The Order this past July. During the twelve-month period between our survey and my presentation at the Convention, our team learned of not one, not two, not three – but eighteen separate suicides or suicide attempts by our pan-Orthodox youth, in our parishes in this country. Eighteen! In one year!

Today, five months later, that number has leapt to twenty-nine. Yes, you read that correctly. Twenty-nine! That means eleven of our Orthodox teens have taken or tried to take their lives in the past five months; teens that are actively engaged in our churches; teens that go to our camps; teens we know. And those are only the incidents we have heard about.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

I do not subscribe to the doom-and-gloom notion that the sky is falling. Quite the contrary, I believe that the tide is starting to turn, and that, with the right supports (and by that, I mean relationships), our youth are going to thrive in and because of their teenage years. It is up to us adults

in their lives to stand with our teens as they experience the deep transformation that occurs when they are presented with the truth, and give them a safe space to wrestle with it, to ask questions about it, and to consider what they believe and why. So many of our young people are seeking answers and guidance from the Church. Let's give it to them. *Because that army it's going to take to guide our kids to the right path? That's us.*

BUT HOW?

For many, there is a feeling that we are unequipped to provide clear, compelling and useful support to counter all the noise coming at our teens these days. We want to address these critical questions and issues, but we don't always know how. We may find ourselves avoiding conversations because these topics are difficult. They are sensitive. They are controversial. And most of us aren't clinicians or theologians.

At Faithtree, we believe our teens need a safe space where they can think through all this stuff. They need a place where deep discussion, exploration, reflection, and explanation can occur. A place where they can grapple with all the opposing messages they get every day. A place where they are heard, respected, and challenged, and can even question and push back.

Our team believes this space is created best in parish communities, where not only their families, but peers and a spiritual leader are present. Our prayer is that if we can create those safe spaces in the context of the Church, our young people will engage and grow closer to Jesus Christ, which is the ultimate goal.

WE CAN DO THIS

Listen: this won't be easy. Our teens have real questions. And they *want* to know what the Church teaches. It has been proven time and time again by research and real experience, however, that many of these questions can't be addressed by a ten-minute sermon. Transformation won't come from just a few simple statements about what the Church does and does not support.

Transformation is a process, and one that *must* take place in the context of deep and meaningful relationships; certainly in God's presence, with parents, teachers, priests and youth workers willing to walk together with our young people.

And we all know the rub: Creating or facilitating those deep relationships, and answering their questions by articulating our rich theology in an engaging and relevant way, well... that's not easy. In fact, it can be a full-time job. That's why Faithtree Resources created the Relationship Project. Our goal is to help our parishes create such a space, and to help articulate the fullness of the Truth as it has been revealed to us by God – in a way our teenagers can understand and relate to.

The newest installment in our teaching series The Relationship Project is coming in February 2020. Visit www.faithtree.org to learn more about The Relationship Project, Part 3: *Understanding Mental Health*.

If we are going to support our youth through these trying times we call adolescence, and guide them to the right path, it will definitely take an army. That army is *us*.

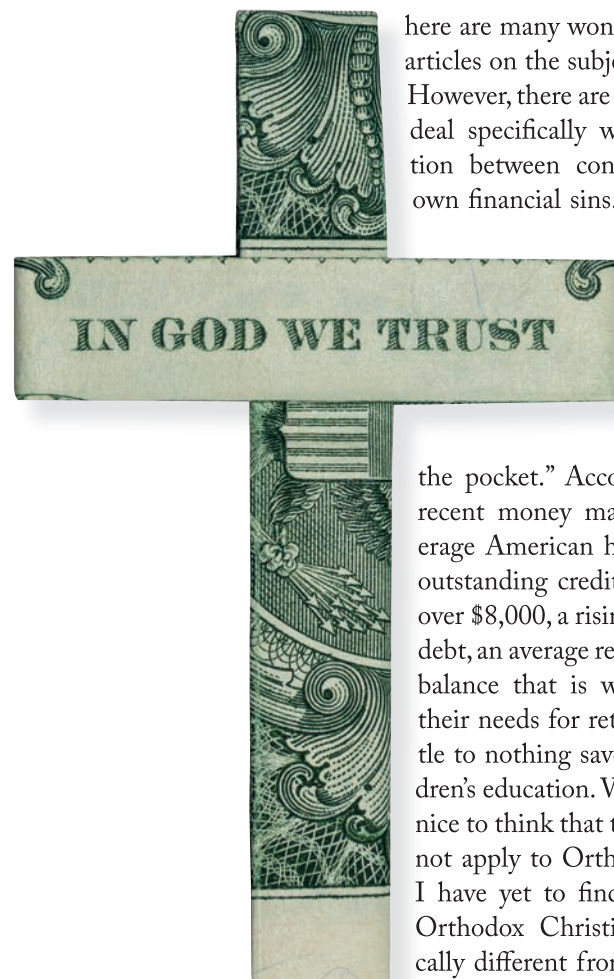
Michelle Moujaes, Executive Director
Faithtree Resources
Michelle lives in Valencia, California.



Confessing Your Financial Sins

Fr. Michael Tassos

IN THIS ARTICLE, I WANT TO EXAMINE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ONE OF THE WONDERFUL TOOLS THE CHURCH PROVIDES US WITH WHICH TO WORK OUT OUR SALVATION – THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION – AND ONE OF THE MOST ORDINARY, PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF OUR LIVES – OUR FINANCES.



here are many wonderful books and articles on the subject of confession. However, there are almost none that deal specifically with the connection between confession and our own financial sins. There is a wonderful Jewish saying that goes, “The longest path is the one that leads from the heart to the pocket.” According to several recent money magazines, the average American household has an outstanding credit card balance of over \$8,000, a rising level of overall debt, an average retirement account balance that is woefully short of their needs for retirement, and little to nothing saved for their children’s education. While it would be nice to think that these statistics do not apply to Orthodox Christians, I have yet to find any proof that Orthodox Christians are statistically different from the rest of the population in this regard.

What is going on? The answer very simply is sin. Most of us would like to do a better job with our finances. We don’t deliberately go out and rack up thousands of dollars of credit card debt overnight, or find ourselves with car pay-

ments and incredibly high mortgages. Sometimes circumstances arise in our lives that force us into our particular choices. Nonetheless, we still have a responsibility to God to be good caretakers of His gifts, and not to squander them foolishly or selfishly.

God places great importance on stewardship not only of our time, but also of our material possessions. If we have fallen short of God’s intention, the simplest and most sincere place to begin is with confession. One of the greatest treasures of the Church is the ability to confess our sins, because by releasing our sins to God we can be lifted up and re-invigorated with life. The Sacrament of Confession makes all this possible.

FAITH, LOVE, AND MONEY

There are three things in this world that most people cherish: their personal faith, the people they love, and money. It would seem that, as a matter of course, most Orthodox Christians would confess something regarding each of these important areas of their lives. It is my experience, however, that only two of the three are usually discussed. The issue of money, which is often the most troubling and the most painful, is sadly omitted. It is one thing to confess frustration or anger with a spouse or loved one, or to describe moments of doubt about God’s love, but to tell God and another human being that you ran up a really large credit card bill, or that you lost a significant portion of your savings in the stock market – now that is really painful!

Many books on confession emphasize making general remarks about your sins. While this is good to a point, we should also be honest about the fact

that the spiritual father who is hearing your confession can’t really help you if you do not provide any specific details.

In his book *The Inner Kingdom*, His Grace Bishop Kallistos Ware refers to a very important passage in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers: “If unclean thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father and condemn them. The more we conceal our thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. . . . [But] once an evil thought is revealed, it is immediately dissipated. . . . Whoever discloses his thoughts is quickly healed.”

Clearly, most priests are not marriage counselors, financial advisors, or medical doctors. They are, however, spiritual counselors, and a confession that is honest, complete, and genuine can truly begin to bring about proper healing. It is God to whom we are confessing, and it is the priest who stands as a witness to the confession.

GROWING UP FINANCIALLY

If we are honest with ourselves and with God, it is safe to say that most of us have never had much training in managing personal finances. We start out as children with the notion of saving and putting money into some sort of piggy bank. We gradually move up to our own checking account, a credit card, a car payment, and finally to a mortgage. As most of us know, there is a huge difference between the days of stuffing change into a piggy bank and making the monthly mortgage payment. All of us grow up receiving instruction in everything under the sun, from driving a car, to getting a job, to cleaning our homes. Sadly though, we receive almost no instruction in how to manage money. Is it no wonder that one of the greatest sources of marital strife is money? Even if we have been taught something about money, we must examine what, exactly, we were taught. Were we taught something along the lines of, “He who dies with the most toys wins”? Or were we taught, “Money is a blessing that should be shared”? For many people there is almost no connection between their financial lives and their spiritual lives.

IS MONEY INHERENTLY BAD OR EVIL?

Money is not inherently bad or evil. It is simply a product of what we do with our labors. It is not a measure of our worth in the eyes of God, despite what many people may think. I personally think of

money as an instrument that can be used for good or bad. We can also think of money as a kind of life substance, much like air, food, or water. It permeates almost everything we do. We need money in order to take care of ourselves, our families, and our community. And much like the way we use these other elements, how we use our money reveals who we are and what we believe.

A priest I know once told me of a visit he took to one of the monasteries on Mount Athos. He went there and asked the abbot to hear his confession. The abbot immediately rebuked him, saying that this man could not be a good priest because he was quite overweight. You can imagine how shocked the priest was to hear these words. He realized, however, that in this particular case the abbot was correct. My friend had to admit that he was a gluttonous person. I am pleased to say that the priest has lost considerable weight and now enjoys a healthy relationship with the abbot. The point is that change would never have occurred without the trust and honesty revealed in confession. Confession reveals to us where we are failing to act in accordance with God’s will.

In fourth-century Egypt, there was a monastic theologian named Evagrius Ponticus. He described the beginning point of sin as logismos, or intellectual activity. It is not so much an intellectual debate, but rather a secret thought that has the power to stir the mind, a kind of secret dialogue. This thought has the ability to move someone to a secret decision against God’s laws. Evagrius goes on to explain that “demons fight rather by means of present things.” By present things he means *pragmata*, or objects; contact with these objects gives rise to passions. In our modern world, there is probably no greater example of what Evagrius is speaking about than a credit card, because it symbolizes and makes available all the things that it can buy.

Think for just a moment whether or not Evagrius’ argument makes some sense. Almost everyone uses money in concert with their feelings to some extent. When people are happy, they tend to buy





ply, is often fear. There is a kind of silent fear in many people's hearts that God will not provide for them or that they somehow have to take all financial matters into their own hands. It's okay to talk about God, but not when it concerns their personal bank accounts. While this couldn't be further from the truth, it is definitely a widely held fear. As with any fear tied to a misunderstanding about God, this can and should be overcome through open and honest confession.

I'M SORRY FOR MY SINS

Now What? There are tremendous dangers associated with money. If the average person has a credit card balance of \$8,000, it may take over five years to pay it off, making slightly more than the minimum payments. We are inundated with countless offers to spend more and to borrow more. In fact, it is actually getting more and more difficult to pay for things with cash. As we move ever closer to a cashless society, the sins of overspending become ever more hidden.

There is no magic pill one can take to eliminate debt. It requires a determined will and the belief that there is a better way. Much like St. Mary of Egypt, who after her conversion spent the next forty years in the Sinai desert, if we have made a mess of our finances, it may take a long time to recover. This is why it is imperative that we discuss the subject of money openly and frankly with our children and family. One of the greatest tools of the evil one is secrecy. We should be no more afraid to discuss money in our households than we should be to discuss Jesus Christ.

If you have made financial mistakes or committed what you would characterize as financial sins, the first place to begin is with confession. I can assure you that you will feel much better. Next, I suggest that you write out your plan to correct your mistakes, keeping in mind that much like losing excess weight, correcting financial mistakes can often take many years. As an aid to your confession, ask

yourself the following questions:

- Did I use all my money in a wise and prudent manner?
- Did I give some portion of the wealth back to God?
- Have I done as good a job as I could have done talking about our personal finances to my spouse and/or children?
- Have I used my credit cards in a prudent manner?
- Have I made purchases that are not in keeping with what God would have me buy?
- Have I at any time used my family's money carelessly, in spite, or in anger?
- Have I truly been as responsible with the financial blessings bestowed upon me as I could have been?

As you can see, all of these questions involve "I," because the process of salvation begins with each of us as individuals. If we are not responsible, then how can we expect those around us to be?

LIFE IN CHRIST

If we are to walk in the Spirit, we must live a life that is pleasing to God in all its facets. Our personal finances are no exception. They are an integral part of who we are; they help define and shape us. Yes, we are called to renounce the things of this world; however, we are also called to be good stew-

ards of everything in this world. We should not lose sight of the fact that we have been called to live in the world and to be witnesses of Christ's glory on earth. In our daily struggles, we must endeavor to be good caretakers of all the bounties given to us, to be responsible children of God, and to pass on to each succeeding generation the importance of good stewardship.

And when we have fallen short of God's glory, we need to partake of the healing that is afforded in confession. Nicholas Gamvas, in his book *The Psychology of Confession and the Orthodox Church*, makes a wonderful point about confession. He says: "The receiving of forgiveness and absolution are aspects of confession that have no clear counterpart in psychotherapy. The Christian who feels truly forgiven and cleansed before God is also free of guilt about his/her own shortcomings."

Much like a surgeon who has to cut away part of our skin to get to a particular organ in our body, we must be willing to peel away the layers of hurt, fear, and anger, in order to begin to heal. Our Lord loves us infinitely more than we can love ourselves. He alone can forgive us when we can't forgive ourselves. I encourage you to take the Sacrament of Confession seriously as the starting point of true healing.

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Fr. Michael is also a certified public accountant.

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things. When they are sad, they may either close off or simply buy more things in order to gain some feeling of joy. In relationships, people often use money as an instrument to control or manipulate the other party. They correlate gift-giving or receiving with affection.

Some people even use money in relationships as a weapon. It is very common in marriages, for example, to find that one person is financially dominant over the other, and when one party feels wronged, they know that the way to inflict pain on the other is simply to buy something. It provides momentary elation and satisfaction, but it often also results in even greater pain and suffering for both parties.

IF I MADE IT, WHY CAN'T I SPEND IT?

We are raised in America to view wealth in very unhealthy ways. We tend to view wealthy individuals as more powerful, more intelligent, or more successful. These distorted perspectives subconsciously move us away from seeing money as a gift from God and us as the caretakers of this treasured gift. Money then becomes not so much a by-product of our labors as a kind of end in itself.

The fact is that we really don't make the money: God bestows it upon us. As Deuteronomy 8:18 says: "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant." We would have nothing without God, and our wealth is truly His. This is a fundamental principle that is sadly being lost.

Why do some give of their wealth so effortlessly, and others so begrudgingly? The answer, quite sim-



LIVING THE LITURGY — A PRACTICAL REFLECTION DISCERNING TRUTH AND OFFERING OURSELVES

PART 5 OF 10



to discern what we might agree with, and what we might disagree with, we need a *guide*, and not someone who simply shuts our questions down. We learn true discernment. This discernment allows us to reconcile our beliefs with the beliefs of the community. We become disciples; we subscribe to the beliefs of *this* community, and we put ourselves under God, living out the call expressed to us in baptism. In the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ commissions His disciples, sending them out into the world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We hear this at the baptismal service, and it’s easy to think things end there. Christ, however, goes on to tell us that the disciples are to teach the new disciples to observe everything that He commanded. As disciples, we are bound by those commandments – and to be clear, they are commandments, not suggestions.

So what does that have to do with the Divine Liturgy? In the Divine Liturgy, we are taught the high calling of our discipleship: to offer ourselves as Christ offered Himself. Following the Creed, we pray the prayers of the *Anaphora*. The word describes the silent prayers that the priest reads before we ask the Holy Spirit to descend on the gifts and change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. There are two authors of these prayers, Ss. John Chrysostom and Basil the Great. The Liturgy of St. John is celebrated most often, with the Liturgy of St. Basil being celebrated during Great Lent and a few other times throughout the year. Through these prayers, both saints teach us about the self-offering character of Christ, and recount the story, culminating in His crucifixion.

This is perhaps most notable in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The priest exclaims: “Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming, and saying,” with the choir finishing the sentence with words by now familiar, from Isaiah: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” The silent prayer goes on: “With these blessed powers (the angels) we also, O Master who lovest mankind, cry aloud and say: Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit; holy art Thou and all-holy, and magnificent is Thy glory, who

hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, who, when He had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which He was betrayed or, rather, gave Himself up for the life of the world....” This prayer points directly to Christ’s self-offering, showing us how to offer ourselves.

Anaphora is Greek for “bearing up.” The *anaphoral* prayers answer the immediate question: What are we bearing up? At the high point of the *anaphora*, the priest or deacon raises the *diskos* and the chalice and the priest says, “Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all.” As I wrote for the article in the September issue, this powerful moment reminds us that the gifts are offered on behalf of all and for all; for the entirety of the world on behalf of the entirety of the world. At the same time, we admit that this is not the best translation of this phrase – rather, it could be, “Yours from what is Yours, we offer to You, in everything and through everything,” reminding us that we serve God by offering ourselves to Him in everything we do. Another way to say this, as Bishop JOHN of the Diocese of Worcester states regularly, would be, “We are called to bring God to the world, and to bring the world to God.” We begin the process of bringing God to the world when we offer ourselves to others.

Conversely, others might be called to find God. Just as the disciples were instructed to make disciples of all nations, we are given this same commission as disciples ourselves. As we follow the discernment process, we become more secure and confident in our faith. We are then able to have different conversations within our other communities, answering any questions people in them may have. Our local parish, that is, the Body of Christ, becomes our base community, showing us the community after which all other communities should be modeled. It is the Church that reminds us that we are called to be servants of Christ Jesus – and of others.

Gregory Abdalah, D.Min.



Following our baptism and chrismation, we belong to God. We become servants of Christ, as we hear in the opening of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus....” Even more than servants, we become disciples. As disciples, we are called to follow Christ and His way. For many Orthodox Christians, this happens at an early age. All too often, however, going to church is something we do only to fulfill a famil-

ial obligation. Doubts and questions often arise, challenging what we think we are “supposed to” believe. This may make us feel like we are in unchartered waters, unclear of where we are, and where we are going.

Recognizing that we belong to a variety of communities helps us to begin wading through our doubts, so that we can understand them. In this way, we own the faith; it is ours, and not simply things we do because we’re obliged to do them. As we develop, our ability to think through things develops with us. By explicitly questioning what we’re told, we can work through our questions, and ultimately solidify what we believe. Throughout this process our communities become increasingly important. As we begin

St. Cyril of Alexandria: Defender of the *Theotokos*

Fr. Daniel Daly

“NOW WHEN JESUS CAME INTO THE DISTRICT OF CAESAREA PHILIPPI, HE ASKED HIS DISCIPLES, ‘WHO DO MEN SAY THAT THE SON OF MAN IS?’ AND THEY SAID, ‘SOME SAY JOHN THE BAPTIST, OTHERS SAY ELIJAH, AND OTHERS JEREMIAH OR ONE OF THE PROPHETS.’ HE SAID TO THEM, ‘BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?’” (MATTHEW 16:13–15).

For Christian people, there can be no questions of more importance than these two questions. They concern the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Each question is important. If the “people” regard Him as the Son of God, they can build a human society guided by his teachings. The second question is one that affects each person who hears the gospel. The answer of each will determine how they live for the rest of their lives.

St. Peter, inspired by the heavenly Father, certainly gave the correct answer, but the issue of the identity of Jesus did not simply go away, and probably never will. St. John the Evangelist, who spoke of Jesus as the “Word made flesh,” whose glory he had seen, had to insist that the One whom he had seen was “that which we heard, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled....” (1 John 1:1–3). Jesus was a real, historic person, with a real human body. This needed to be affirmed by John, because heretics claimed that the physical body of Jesus only “seemed” to be real. It was only an “appearance.” There was no Incarnation, no suffering and no death for the Person of Jesus, and consequently no salvation. (These heretics were forerunners of a later group, called Docetists, or “Illusionists.”)

The identity of Jesus was debated for the next four centuries. And the theologian who would write the definitive answer to the question was St. Cyril of Alexandria (A.D. 376–444). He has been called the greatest christologist.

Between the Apostles Peter and John, and the fifth-century era of Cyril, the question of the identity of Jesus arose many times. It would be impossible here to cover in any detail the entirety of the christological controversies in the first four centuries. However,

some of the more noteworthy figures would include the Jewish-Christian sect of the Ebionites, who simply regarded Him as the natural son of both Joseph and Mary; Theodotus of Byzantium, who in the Second Century argued that Jesus was a human being “adopted” by God, probably when He was baptized by John in the Jordan; and the third-century Sabellius, who advocated the concept of “modalism,” in which the Three Persons of the Godhead were simply three different “modes” of the One God.

While some denied the full divinity of Jesus, others would eliminate his complete humanity. The Docetists denied that Jesus had a human body. The followers of Appolinarius of Laodicea believed that the Word of God simply united with human flesh, with the Logos replacing the human soul of Jesus.

These early heresies did not go unanswered. In the First Century, St. Ignatius of Antioch continued the fight against the incipient Docetists. In the Second Century, Docetism became more fully developed in the form of Gnosticism, a serious heresy that spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The “gnostic” Jesus was born without any participation of the material world. He was part of the gnostic *pleroma* (fullness) of divine beings who descended into the material world. In his famous *Adversus Hereses*, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, defended the historical Christ.

As troublesome as these early years were, in the Fourth Century a heresy arose that might be compared to a plague of locusts. Arising out of Egypt, it spread throughout the East. The Gothic tribes carried it to western Europe, Spain and North Africa. Named after its founder, Arius, a priest of Alexandria, it is the heresy we know as Arianism. In 325,

Emperor Constantine, not wishing to have his Empire divided, called the Christian bishops to Nicaea to resolve the problem. The Council of Nicaea produced the first part of the Nicene creed, declaring that Jesus is of the same substance as the Father. He was “true God from true God.” Arius had denied His divinity.

The battle against Arius was begun by his fellow Alexandrian, St. Athanasius. Arianism in various forms did not disappear after the Council of Nicaea. Many would argue the Jesus had a nature that was “similar” to the Father, rather than one that was the same as the Father. By the late Fourth Century, Arianism had taken over the city of Constantinople. St. Jerome lamented, “The whole world groaned, and was astonished to find itself Arian.”

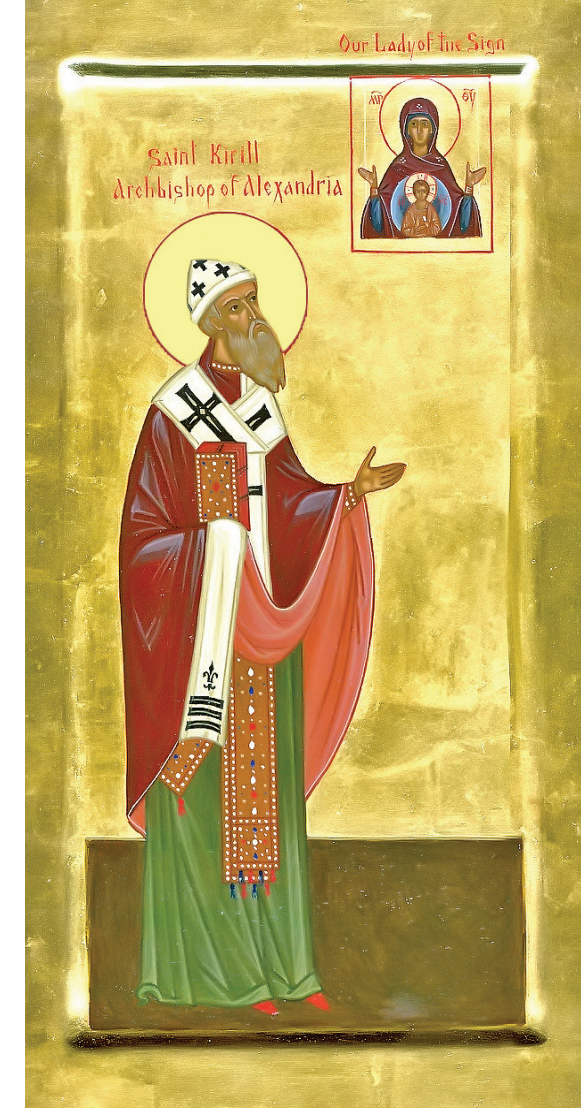
The Second Ecumenical Council was called in 381 in Constantinople to continue the fight against Arianism, but also to condemn the theology of Apollinarius, who taught that Jesus had an incomplete humanity.

In 431, the Third Ecumenical Council met in Ephesus to challenge the teaching of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who refused to accept the term *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”) for the Virgin Mary. It is during this controversy that St. Cyril of Alexandria became perhaps the most important defender, not only of the title *Theotokos*, but of the identity of Jesus Christ. Cyril was a most prolific writer. Prior to his controversy with Nestorius, his works were largely exegetical and anti-Arian. We will look more closely at St. Cyril and his work in the context of the Nestorian controversy.

THE LIFE OF CYRIL

We know very little about his early years. He was born in the town of Didoussia, Egypt, about 378 A.D. His maternal uncle, Theophilus, was the Archbishop of Alexandria. It is most likely that his uncle guided his education. St. Cyril’s education involved the study of the theologians of Alexandria: Origen, Didymus the Blind, St. Athanasius, and even St. John Chrysostom. John McGuckin notes that “he was evidently schooled in rhetoric, but the substance of his learning is built upon the twin pillars of biblical theology and the prior patristic tradition.”¹ Scripture and the Church Fathers will be the foundation of his theology.²

We meet St. Cyril in a somewhat awkward situation, at least for us. He was in Constantinople with



his uncle Theophilus, where they went to depose St. John Chrysostom. A group of Egyptian monks had come to Constantinople, complaining of how they were being treated by Bishop Theophilus. In 403 A.D., Emperor Arcadius demanded that Theophilus come to Constantinople to apologize to St. John. Theophilus arrived with twenty-nine of his suffragan bishops, (a lesson Cyril would remember later), held a council, and challenged St. John. As things turned out, it was St. John Chrysostom who was called to apologize. St. John was deposed from his office at the Synod of the Oak in 403, with the support of Theophilus and Cyril. He was not deposed for his theology, but rather for disciplinary reasons. This did not prove to be a permanent estrangement between these two Fathers of the Church. Cyril would later use the writings of St. John and speak of him as a standard of Orthodoxy. During subsequent years, Cyril was groomed for the position of archbishop. After the death of his uncle, he was consecrated on October 18, 412.³



NESTORIUS AND THE CONTROVERSY

Nestorius was born in the city of Germanicia in the province of Syria. He was a student of Theodore of Mopsuestia. He lived as a priest-monk near Antioch. It is likely that he was chosen to be the Patriarch of Constantinople because of his fame as a preacher. He was probably recommended by Patriarch John of Antioch, who was his friend. In 428, Nestorius arrived in Constantinople with a number of monks, the most problematic of whom would be the priest Anastasius. Nestorius managed to incur the antipathy of the monastics in Constantinople, sending them back to their monasteries, and also the very rich and powerful sister of the Emperor, Pulcheria. He publicly refused to give her communion in the sanctuary with her brother. (This was a privilege of the Emperor.) Pulcheria opened a church for herself and the dissident monastics. Although her brother initially supported Nestorius, Pulcheria and the monastics allied themselves with Cyril.

John McGuckin describes Nestorius as a “consistent, if none too clear, exponent of the longstanding Antiochene dogmatic tradition.”⁴ Nestorius was greatly surprised that what he had always taught in Antioch without any controversy whatsoever should prove to be so objectionable to the Christians of Constantinople.

Nestorius’s rejection of the term *Theotokos* was not new. It had been rejected by his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia back in Antioch. What had been a non-issue in Antioch, became in Constantinople a debate that rose to the importance of Arianism and Appolinarism, both of which were resolved by an Ecumenical Council. Nestorius decided to hold a public debate over the issue of the term *Theotokos*. His spokesman was the monk Anastasius, who “repeated the longstanding argument: ‘Let no man call Mary Mother of God for she was but a woman, and it is impossible for God to be born of a woman.’”⁵ Nestorius was fond of using the expression strictly speaking in his writings. His adversaries mocked him by saying, “If Mary is not, strictly speaking, the Mother of God, then her son is not, strictly speaking, God!”⁶ What troubled his adversaries was that his refusal to accept the term *Theotokos* implied that there were two separate persons in Christ, one divine and one human. A divided Christ meant that there was no real unity between the divine and the human. If so, this called salvation itself into question. Believing that a council would decide in his favor, he asked the emperor for one. The Emperor, however, called the Council not in Constantinople but in the City of Ephesus, which was the most important shrine of Mary. This placed Nestorius at a serious disadvantage.

THE ISSUE

The complex theological question was “How did the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, unite Himself to humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ?” “What was the relationship between the divine and the human?” At issue were the full divinity of Christ and His full humanity, and, most important, His existence as One Person. Was His humanity simply “absorbed” by his divinity?⁷ What did it mean either to say that Mary was *Theotokos*, or to deny it? To whom did she give birth? Nestorius of Constantinople was the spokesman for what would be regarded as the heresy of Nestorianism, the denial of the term *Theotokos* for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Cyril was his adversary. In the dispute, Cyril would clarify the questions regarding Christology and permanently make the term *Theotokos*, or Mother of God, an established part of the theology and piety of the Church.

THE COMPLICATING FACTORS

Language

Among the complicating factors of the controversy was *language*. In English we can simply say that Jesus had a human nature and a divine nature, and that they were united in One Person.

Unfortunately words such as *ousia* (nature) and *hypostasis* (individual) might be used interchangeably. The terminology was problematic.⁸

Antioch versus Alexandria

A further complication was the differing theologies of Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. Each had its unique history as a theological center. “Antioch tended to hold apart Christ’s divine and human natures, and the Alexandrian school . . . stressed their dynamic unity.”⁹ Each school had its own theologians. Antioch had Lucian, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Cyrus. Alexandria had Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Didymous the Blind, and the great St. Athanasius. Each school had its representative in the current debate: Nestorius of the Antiochian, and Cyril of the Alexandrian.

Alexandria versus Constantinople

The third Canon of the First Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) stated that “the Bishop of Constantinople . . . shall have the prerogative of honor after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is New Rome.” Although Constantinople, founded in 320 A.D., was the New Rome and the City of Constantine, Alexandria was far older as a





1. John McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, St. Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, p. 3. McGuckin's work is a comprehensive and very readable account of the events of St. Cyril's life and of the Council of Ephesus.
2. The appeal of Cyril to both Scripture and the Fathers sets the pattern of theology for the Church. Johannes Quasten notes, "It is certainly his merit that from now on Patristic testimony stands with Scriptural as authority in theological argumentation" (*Patrology*, vol. 3, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, MD, p. 135).
3. Western historians have treated Cyril in a negative light. This partly due to the anti-Christian biases of the "Age of Enlightenment," and the anachronistic treatment of the fifth-

center of Christianity. Founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., the city was second only to Rome in its size and wealth. It was the city where the Septuagint Bible was translated several centuries earlier. It was the home of the philosopher Plotinus, who would influence later Christian authors. The church of Alexandria was founded by the Apostle Mark. It was the city of Origen and St. Athanasius. That these two cities and their churches would be competitive is understandable. The two Antiochians, St. John Chrysostom and Patriarch Nestorius, were driven from their sees by Alexandrian patriarchs.

The Term Theotokos

The term *theotokos* had been used for more than a century before its rejection by Nestorius. Origen (184–253 A.D.) may have been the first to use it. It was used by the fourth-century theologians Athanasius in 330 and Gregory the Theologian in 370. The Antiochian Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428) may have been the first to deny the title. "Mary bore Jesus, not the Word, for the Word was remained omnipresent, although from the beginning he dwelt in Jesus in a peculiar manner. Thus Mary is properly the Mother of Christ (Christotokos), but not the Mother of God (Theotokos)." As a pupil of Theodore in Antioch, it was no surprise that Nestorius followed this line of thought.

What was needed was a clear resolution of the

doctrine about Christ. Mariology and Christology were now part of a common debate. If Nestorius denied the term *Theotokos*, he was undermining the Incarnation. The term *Theotokos* had serious repercussions not only for the Christian knowledge of Mary but even more for that of Christ.¹⁰

The opponents of Nestorius were able to gain the support of Cyril of Alexandria and the monks of Egypt. Both Nestorius and Cyril sent appeals to Pope Celestine in Rome. This resulted in a Roman council. It condemned the teaching of Nestorius. Cyril was appointed to pronounce the sentence of deposition on Nestorius if he did not submit.

In December of 430, delegates were sent from Alexandria to Constantinople condemning Nestorius. Cyril's letter to Nestorius also attached twelve anathemas, and told Nestorius he had ten days to retract his position. The letters of Nestorius to Pope Celestine went unanswered. As a consequence of the dispute, the Emperor arranged for the Council to be held in Ephesus in 431.

The clarity of Cyril's theology is expressed in his first Letter to Nestorius.¹¹

For we do not say that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh, or that it was converted into a whole man consisting of a soul and body; but rather that the Word having personally united to himself to flesh animated by a rational soul, did in an ineffable and inconceivable manner become man and was called the Son of Man, not merely as willing or being pleased to be so called, neither on account of taking to himself a person but because the two natures being brought together in a true union; there is of both one Christ and one Son; for the difference of the natures is not taken away by the union, but rather the divinity and the humanity make perfect for us the one Lord Jesus Christ by their ineffable and inexpressible union.

...

But since, for us and for our salvation, he personally united to himself a human body, and came forth of a woman, he is in this way said to be born after the flesh; for he was not first born a common man of the holy Virgin and then the Word came down and entered into him, but the union being made in the womb itself he is said to endure a birth after the flesh, ascribing to himself the birth of his own flesh.....This was

the sentiment of the holy Fathers; *therefore they ventured to call the holy Virgin, the Mother of God (Theotokos)*, not as if the nature of the Word or his divinity had its beginning from the holy Virgin but because of her was born the holy body with a rational soul to which the Word being personally united is said to be born of the flesh.¹²

The Council of Ephesus

On the 19th of November 430 A.D., Emperor Theodosius II, yielding to the request of Nestorius, called for the Council that would meet in Ephesus on Pentecost, June 7 of the following year. Ephesus was the site of the most famous Marian shrine. This gave Cyril an initial advantage.

By June 7, Nestorius and his sixteen bishops were the first to arrive. When he arrived in Ephesus, the local Metropolitan Memnon did not greet him and would not allow him to use any of the churches. Cyril and his entourage of 50 bishops were greeted as visiting dignitaries. The bishops of the Ephesus region and Jerusalem supported Cyril. Other than the papal delegates, Italy was not represented, nor was North Africa. The council was largely an Eastern affair.

Cyril opened the Council on June 22, 431. He did not wait for the arrival of John of Antioch and his Syrian delegation, which would have been more favorable toward Nestorius. The representatives of Pope Celestine had also not arrived.

Nonetheless, against the advice of the representative of the Emperor, and coercing him to read the official document from the Emperor, the Council was officially opened. The letters of both Cyril and Nestorius were read. Cyril's was approved and Nestorius' was condemned. The Creed of Nicaea was reaffirmed, Nestorius was deposed and excommunicated. Cyril had won the day in this first session, but the approval of the Emperor was still not given.

The Syrian delegation were at a marked disadvantage in coming to Ephesus. Some bishops had to journey from Persia and Arabia. Antioch was still over 700 miles from Ephesus. The Antiochian delegation arrived four days late. Not surprisingly, they were angry at being left out of the proceedings. They held their own council, at which they excommunicated Cyril and Memnon the bishop of Ephesus, and the bishops who had supported Cyril. The weeks that followed were a time of conflict and

chaos on all sides.

After the arrival of the papal delegation, six more sessions were held in Ephesus. Both Nestorius and Cyril wrote letters to Emperor Theodosius, pleading their cases. Many in Constantinople were demanding the deposition of Nestorius. The emperor decided to reject both the Council headed by Cyril and that of John of Antioch. The bishops were not allowed to leave Ephesus until the matters were settled. Representatives of the two factions were called to meet at Chalcedon. John of Antioch no longer supported Nestorius, while the supporters of Cyril were adamant in their support. In the end Theodosius allowed Nestorius to return to his monastery. Cyril was allowed to return to Alexandria. Cyril had been victorious. His theology and language would be used by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

The importance of Cyril's victory cannot be overstated. The term *Theotokos* affirmed unequivocally that the one born of Mary, who suffered, died, and rose again, was one Person, God incarnate. The rejection of the term would have meant a Christ divided into two persons. A human Christ could not restore us to God. Any other understanding of Christ becomes confused and misleading. The salvation of man began at the moment when the Word of God became incarnate in the womb of Mary, who is truly *Theotokos*.

In time the differences between Alexandria and Antioch were settled. Antioch accepted the term *Theotokos*. Cyril accepted the fact that while their language was different, their faith was one.

Was Nestorius himself really guilty of the heresy of Nestorianism? That debate continues today. His later writings insist that he did not believe that there were "two persons" in Christ. In any case, Nestorianism is a heresy. We are indebted to Cyril in two very important ways. He provided the most complete and Orthodox answer to the question of the identity of Jesus Christ, and he assured the position of Mary as Mother of God for all generations. Much of modern Christianity needs to rediscover not only the title *Theotokos*, but the its implication for the understanding of the mystery of salvation.

Fr. Daniel Daly

- century Alexandrian church.
4. Cf. McGuckin, op. cit., p. 22.
 5. Ibid. p. 29.
 6. Ibid.
 7. J.N.D. Kelly notes that, with his Alexandrian background, "the Christological problem did not present itself to him as that of explaining the union of two disparate natures. . . . He thought rather of two phases or stages in the existence of the Logos, one prior to and the other after the Incarnation. The Logos as he liked to say 'remains what He was'" (*Early Christian Doctrines*, Prince Press, Peabody, MA, 2000, p. 319).
 8. "He (Cyril) used the term *physis* and *hypostasis* without any distinction to signify 'nature' as well as 'person' (Quasten, op. cit., p. 139).
 9. Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986), p. 41.
 10. McGuckin, op. cit., p. 21.
 11. This is only one of a number of significant letters written by Cyril in this controversy. This was true also of Nestorius, A discussion of the Council of Ephesus, including the documents of the council, may be found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, pp.192–242.
 12. Ibid. p. 198.

"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

CUTTING IT CLOSE IN GILLETTE AND RAPID

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

Allowing for potential weather events, I had scheduled my arrival on Thursday, but flights did not cooperate. Staring at the overhead screen after checking in, it dawned on me that, due to delays, I likely would miss my connection in Denver.

When this was brought to the attention of the customer service rep, I was as-

sured that, at present, everything should work out. That would be nice for the folks at St. John, Rapid City, South Dakota. They, along with Holy Resurrection, Gillette, Wyoming, had been without a priest for two years.

It's a two-hour drive between those communities, and leaving out of Gillette for the return flight made the most sense; thus, that was my roundtrip destination. This was my second Christmas visit to the Black Hills region. Both were planned for a day or two before Christmas, to let me get back to my parish in Houston for the Feast.

Alas, because of a long delay pulling up to an available gate in Denver, I just missed my connection. As it was "Christmas weekend," there were few alternatives; none that would work. "I can get you there tomorrow evening," the flight rep said. "No, you see, I'm a priest and one of the parishes I'm visiting will be without Christmas services if I don't make it in time."

It was getting late, and whatever the solution would be, it would have to wait until morning. The airline would put me up in a hotel, but what to do the following day? "Have them pull my bags off the plane," I said; "I'll rent a car and drive." The look from the customer service rep was like, "Mmm. O ... kay." (Driving six hours north from Denver in December can be iffy.)

I searched up rates for a one-way rental car to Denver. Have you ever tried to rent a car for next-day travel, one way, on Christmas weekend? Not good! I called the Chairman of the Department of Missions and Evangelism, Fr. John Finley. After listening to my dilemma, he said, "Do it. Just do it! Don't worry about the cost. We'll find the money."

Thank God for the ministry of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. While the extra car rental wasn't cheap, it was less than the annual pledge of a Knight or Dame. Such situations would find little or no solution without the help of the Order; and the Order supports the work of the Department of Missions and Evangelism.

On Friday morning, December 21, I began the six-hour drive to Gillette – where I switched to my previously scheduled (and pre-paid) rental car. Then I drove two and a half hours to Rapid City. There I heard confessions, served Great Vespers, heard more confessions, and enjoyed the fellowship of the people of St. John. On Saturday, December 22, it was Orthros and Divine Liturgy, followed by the singing of carols, and fellowship. A full house! I drove back to Gillette for Great Vespers, confessions, and fellowship at Holy Resurrection.

On Sunday, December 23, I served Orthros and Divine Liturgy. This was followed by the singing of carols and more fellowship. Because I had an early return flight (1 p.m.), I was unable to stay for fellowship. Thankfully, my return flight to Houston was not delayed.

As I stated to His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, in my report, "All in all, it was a joyful weekend – bringing a bit of Christmas (early) to these thirsty communities." That's just a part of the ministry of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch: bringing the Joy of Christmas to those without pastoral care. I've experienced it: The Order provides drink for those who thirst.

Thank you!



SHARING THE FAITH

BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,



"This then, is our task: to educate ourselves and our children in godliness"

– St. John Chrysostom

Parents, Teachers, and Church School Directors – if

you made any New Year's resolutions last month, I hope one of them was to join our online communities. We post daily for teachers and parents, and provide useful and thoughtful resources – continuing education at your fingertips – to help you be the best parent, teacher or director for God's children. If you are already online with us, share a post with a friend and invite them to join too!



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The resources for parents and teachers are posted simultaneously on Facebook and WordPress, with WordPress offering an archive and search bar. A valuable resource that had 700 downloads the first year it was posted and is now in the archives is the "Great Lent and Holy Week Activity Calendar." You can find it here: orthodoxchristianparenting.files.wordpress.com/2015/02

On our social networking sites, you'll often find book reviews. One of the books reviewed for the Parenting sites was, *Tending the Garden of Our Hearts*, published by Ancient Faith Press to help families make the forty days a time of growing together spiritually. Kristina provided an overview of the book she co-authored with Elissa Bjeletich, which we reprinted for these pages.

I also share my thoughts here, not as an essay, but as two smaller pieces: "Concerning a Fruitful Lent," directly below, and, further on, concerning the 2020 Creative

Festivals. The theme is a critical one this year. It is a corrective to the widely held notion that we exist in a "neutral" world, and that Christ, like Santa, will reward the good.

Concerning a "Spiritually Fruitful Lent"

There are many ways we can grow closer to God: through Scripture reading, prayer, and church services. All can make for a spiritually fruitful Lent. We can see this growth, however, as allowing God to change our lives. In the forty days we are urged toward *dependence on God, repentance, and humility* – the right dispositions, as Orthodox Christians know. With these in place we can indeed manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Galatians 5:22).

Time and Zacchaeus. How easy it is to consider Lent as simply a negative period of time. In reality, Lenten seasons are a gift of time. One of the ways Judaism differed from the pagan religions was the commandment to "keep holy the Sabbath," which for them was the last day of the week, Saturday. As soon after, the Israelites began forty years of wandering in the desert, there were no holy sites for worship. Instead, a portion of time was to be kept holy, to reflect on one's life, to repent, and to draw near to God.

A portion of time to reflect; to repent; and to draw near to God. That is what God asked of the Israelites 3,000 years ago, and has never stopped asking of His people. The Great Fast is the *yearly* portion of time that is to be kept holy, peaceful, and focused on God. Today this can be difficult. We are "distracted to death," and can unplug only with great effort. We need a heart like Zacchaeus – *yearning for God*. He knew the opportunity to see Jesus was fleeting, and he gave up not only his time, but his very dignity, to do so.

And Jesus looked up and saw him in the tree, and said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:1–10).

Carole A. Buleza, Director

With gratitude, we acknowledge the contribution of the Order of St. Ignatius that partially funds the work of our Department.



DEPARTMENTAL NOTES

The Department’s “Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Volunteers” is a project headed by Anna-Sarah Farha as part of her task as the Associate for Church School Directors. It has been developed in collaboration with other staff members. Recently, we conferred with companies that provide background checks, which would streamline the process for parishes, but postponed the expected completion date of this project. We plan to have a package ready for the spring.

We have also begun planning for a one-year high school program on moral issues.



AODCE SOCIAL NETWORKING MINISTRY

To nurture the children God has placed in our care!

Greetings **Teachers** and **Parents**,

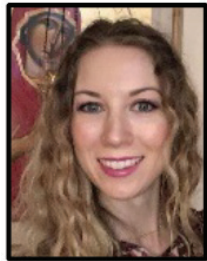
We invite you to join our online communities for these upcoming series.

Parents will get a sampling of Fr. Michael Shanbour’s new catechism book, *The Good Samaritan: A Children’s Catechism*. Snippets from the “lessons,” (chapters) of the book will be provided, along with suggested activities and/or resources related to the lesson in focus.

Teachers will find posts about Brain-Based Teaching and Learning, a theory and methodology centered on creating lessons and educational experiences which target the way that students’ brains are best able to learn.

We continue to pin helpful links as well as our blog posts to our Pinterest boards, where you can find many wonderful ideas for Orthodox parents and teachers.

Kristina Wenger, Staff Assistant for Social Network Ministry



ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTORS

Starting this month on the Orthodox Christian Church School Directors Facebook page, I will be reporting in real time from my home parish of St. George Church, Jacksonville, Florida, about the inaugural year of our Church School’s First Confession Program. Follow along as I share curriculum, resources, photos, administrative details, and more.

Other recent topics of discussion on our Facebook page have been how to organize successful Creative Arts workshops, and how to make Sunday Church Schools welcoming to all students – based on recommendations from Summer Kinard’s book, *Of Such Is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability*.

Anna-Sarah Farha,
Diocesan Coordinator for Miami and the Southeast and Associate for Church School Directors



TRAINING UPDATES

The Department of Christian Education plans and facilitates teacher and Church School Director workshops across the Archdiocese. We have two levels of “prepared” workshops for teachers, each with a certificate of completion, and a workshop for Church School Directors. Here is a listing of our prepared training modules.

Teacher Training I includes the following courses: Overview of Orthodoxy, Teaching Techniques, and Curriculum & Resources.

The courses in TTI are conducted by one trainer. A typical schedule is 9 a.m.–4 p.m. A light breakfast and lunch are provided by the host parish.

Teacher Training II consists of training on the Elementary and the Middle School/High School Level. The workshops are scheduled concurrently, with one trainer for each level. The typical day is 9 a.m.–4 p.m., with a continental breakfast and lunch provided by the host parish.

Elementary Level courses include Enriching the Classroom Experience, Child Development and the Exceptional Learner, and Creative Expression, Elementary.

Middle School/High School Level courses include Adolescent Needs, Moral Issues Overview, and Creative Expression, MS/HS. The Creative Expressions Courses for elementary and middle school/high school can be one session.

Church School Director (CSD) includes the following courses: Introduction to Church School Ministry, Build Your Staff, Build Your Students, Curriculum & Resources for the CSD.

We can also tailor sessions specifically for your needs. Please contact me at aodce.events@gmail.com for more information.

Leslie Atherholt
Staff Assistant for Special Projects and Website

CREATIVE FESTIVALS 2020

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Through the lesson plans, theme song, posters, suggestions for using the theme throughout the year, and other resources provided by the Department of Christian Education, the students will gain a greater understanding of this theme. These resources, along with a listing of where to send entries in each diocese, can be found at ww1.antiochian.org/festivals. Please note that the due date for most dioceses is April 1.

My Thoughts on the Theme

By Carole Buleza

The theme is a critical one this year. It is a corrective to the idea that we exist in a “neutral” world and that Christ, like Santa, will reward the good (which trivializes Christ’s death and resurrection). While indeed we will come to judgment, or rather our life will be our judge, our faith has never seen the world as “neutral.” On the contrary, our faith teaches us that our world is “fallen” and humanity with it (yet not totally bereft of God’s imprint of goodness and beauty). Jesus did not *need* to condemn the world. Since we are its stewards, we and all Creation have been condemned since the time of Adam and Eve.

Jesus needed to rescue us (the name Jesus means “God saves”) from sickness, sin and natural disasters. God’s love of Creation, and desire to keep it from corruption, is noted by St. Athanasius: *“For it were not worthy of God’s goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practised on men by the devil”* (On the Incarnation, 6.5).

The devil’s ultimate weapon was death. Alone to be feared, indeed, but more significantly, the cause of hopelessness and resentment leading to sin during life. Why labor so hard to be a righteous person if our lives end in nothingness? Why not do whatever we want and live as we please?

Jesus was aware of the desperation and tragedies of the world, and defeated evil at every turn. He rescued the sick with healing, the despairing sinner with forgiveness, and those in peril from nature when he stilled the sea. He showed evil to be powerless before Him. He gave us hope for all circumstances, *“In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).



Hope was in Christ’s initial message, *“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17). He performed miracles and healings with compassion, so that the people would see His love and believe in the Kingdom He preached. *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also”* (John 14:1–3).

When He rose from the grave and appeared to the disciples, they knew that He had triumphed over death and the devil. As St. John Chrysostom writes, *“Let no one fear death, for the Savior’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it”* (Paschal Sermon), and we sing to this day the song of triumph and victory: “by His death, He conquered death!”

The despair, killing, cheating, cruelty and all other sins can be traced to the deceit of the devil, the belief that “this world is all there is to existence, and that we are our own masters.” Christ has saved us from that false belief and brought us into the way of life of the Kingdom. He has given us His Spirit as a pledge of the Truth, and His love, peace, and joy as signs of His abiding presence. Jesus came into the world to rescue us for the Kingdom, both here and now, and for all eternity. That is the good news.

BOOK OVERVIEW

By Kristina Wenger

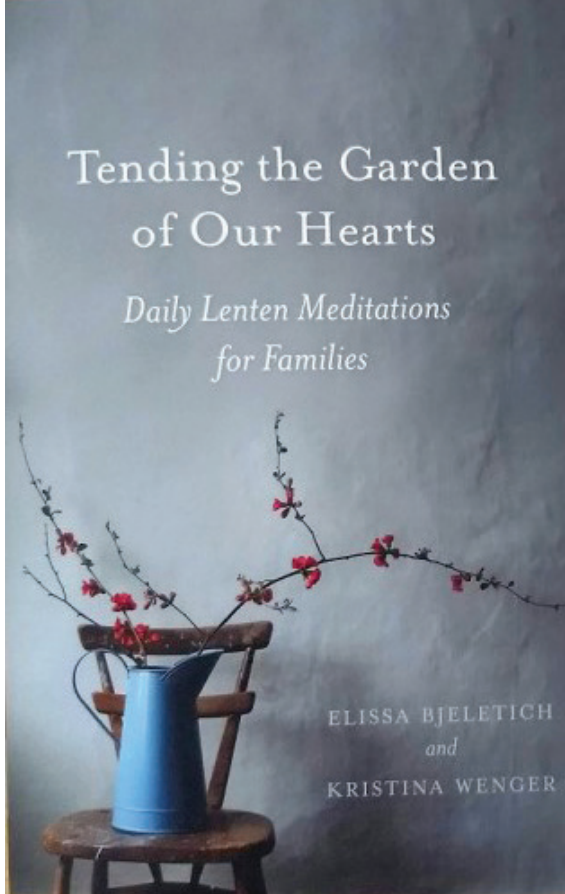
TENDING THE GARDEN OF OUR HEARTS: Daily Lenten Meditations for Families

By Elissa Bjeletich and Kristina Wenger

Tending the Garden of Our Hearts offers one meditation each day of Great Lent and Holy Week, including a final meditation for Pascha. The themes are loosely based on the Lenten Activity Calendar I wrote years ago, found at <https://orthodoxchristianparenting.files.wordpress.com/2015/02>.

Some meditations feature a scripture. On other days, we learn from the life of a saint. Every meditation concludes with a few questions, then a discussion question. This question allows readers to make the book their own as they talk together about how to apply that day’s lesson.

The book concludes with a fairly extensive appendix of related ideas for each week’s theme. The appendix begins



with suggestions of ways to count down to Pascha. This should help solidify and mark the passage of time, especially for young children. At our website, there are a few printable pages and supplemental resources related to some of these ideas. They can be found at <https://tending-the-garden.com>.

Here are a few gleanings from the book:

“Have you ever prayed for someone who was mean to you? God asks us to pray for our enemies, because mean people really need our prayers to help their hearts soften so they will repent, and also because when we pray for someone, we begin to see them as God sees them. We begin to love them and to feel sad for them because they are so twisted up and mean and unhappy” (36).

“We Orthodox love to light candles at Pascha and throughout the year. They provide light for our services, but they also remind us of the fire of God. Our God is light and truth – and He comes to us as a fire that burns away sin but does not consume us. When we light candles, we are reminded who our God is” (65).

“We don’t know when the Bridegroom will come – the Second Coming of Christ could happen today, or it may not happen for a long time. We just don’t know. But we do know that we have today. Today we can pray, today we can fast, today we can show love to the people around us, softening our hearts and building up that supply of oil. When the time comes, no one can give us soft hearts – we will have to work on our hearts now, by loving God and loving one another” (208).

“Imagine if you were to take a piece of clay and rub it in

your warm hands. The clay begins hard and almost solid and impenetrable, like our hearts, but as we work it with our warm hands, the clay becomes soft and flexible. God’s warm presence does that for us; He transforms the hardness of our hearts into softness. And just like that clay, our hearts might just grow hard again if we stop praying for a while, but simply returning to prayer begins to warm us up again” (83).

“When we have become non-possessive (meaning that we have stopped caring so much about owning things), we trust completely that God will send whatever we need, as we need it. Instead of trying to own everything we will ever need and holding it tight, we turn to God. We trust that if we need something, He will send it” (145).

“Sometimes we expect healing to look a certain way, but in fact what God sends is different from our expectations and much better for us. Like Naaman, when we come to the Lord for healing, if we can humble ourselves, we will find that God sends both spiritual and physical healing” (119–120).

The above is an excerpt; find the entire article at <https://orthodoxchristianparenting.wordpress.com/2019/02/13/>. The book may be purchased from store.ancientfaith.com

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“FROM THESE STONES”

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

A NEW KIND OF MISSION: PITTSBURGH 2020

Deacon Adam Roberts

In the Third Century, a terrible plague fell upon the Roman Empire. While most people were running from this plague, persecuted Christians were caring for its victims. This is not the only story in this vein. Stories about acts of mercy and unconditional love are present throughout the history of Christianity.

Fast forward two millennia. From 1950 to 1990, the Hill District of Pittsburgh lost over 70 percent of its residents as a result of urban redevelopment. Today over 40 percent of the residents live below the poverty level. For over thirty years the area did not have a supermarket. Fr. Paul Abernathy, Pastor of St. Moses the Black Mission in Pittsburgh, knew that he wanted to go in and care for the people left behind while everyone else was trying to leave. His ministry has grown to a full medical clinic, daily spiritual care, and a gun-violence response unit to help communities heal. Fr. Paul and a strong team of leaders are remaining in the community and are performing daily acts of mercy in an area many consider an afterthought and lost cause. They are redeeming the suffering through a Christ-like presence.

Within the DNA of Christianity is a desire to help and make a difference. Many Christians, however, are stuck at ground zero. Many, like me, are not sure where to begin. How do we, inspired by Jesus’ acts of mercy to those in need, become a catalyst for change in our own communities? How do we live up to our tradition of caring for others when no one else will?

The Department of Missions & Evangelism is organizing a new kind of mission trip. In this new effort, the Department is partnering with Fr. Paul Abernathy and the Neighborhood Reconciliation Project (formerly FOCUS Pittsburgh) to provide an opportunity for service and training. The

Neighborhood Resilience Project is a training center for learning how to be present in the community and be a catalyst for change.

This summer the Missions and Evangelism Department is piloting these new mission trips comprised of service and training. A standard trip is seven days long. Each morning will be an investment in the Hill District, with projects such as beautification and feeding the needy. Each afternoon the leadership team at the Neighborhood Reconciliation Project will train volunteers how to be present in their own communities and become a catalyst for change.

Special attention will also be given to the demographic hometown of the volunteers. For example, many of our churches are not located in inner-city areas, but out in suburbia. Commuter churches are a different demographic. Fr. Paul and his team are prepared to equip the volunteers from both the inner-city and suburban churches.

Each day during the trip, volunteers will experience firsthand what it means and looks like to be fully present in a community. After the experience, trainers will teach the volunteers how to be fully present in their own community. Just as those Christians did back in the Third Century, volunteers will be equipped to care for those back home for whom no one else is caring.

For more information about these mission trips, as well as registration details, visit www.james218.com.



Deacon Adam Roberts
Department of Missions and Evangelism

HOSPITALITY

IT'S EVERYONE'S JOB!

I've been thinking about writing this article for many years. Until recently, I thought the title would be "Every Church Needs a Sam and Mae." Let me explain. My husband and I first visited an Orthodox Church in 1995. We were approached immediately after Liturgy by a kind man named Sam. He insisted, in his own special way, that we join him and his wife, Mae, for a cup of coffee and a donut in the church hall. He and his wife introduced us to other parishioners, invited us for dinner, and made us feel welcome throughout our time in that parish. We watched as they offered this same hospitality to many other newcomers over the years. Their hospitality bore witness to Christ's love and left an impression on us.

We have been blessed to visit many Orthodox parishes while traveling. Because of work-related relocations, we've been members of several churches since becoming Orthodox. We've met other Sam and Mae's: the ones who light up when you enter the church building as though they were expecting your visit; the ones who ask about your absence when you miss a week from church.



Are you familiar with these lyrics?: "Sometimes you want to go/ Where everybody knows your name,/ and they're always glad you came...."

The lyrics describe a bar, and they come from the theme song of the old situation-comedy, "Cheers." Ironically, these lyrics could and should describe a church. Over the years, I have fallen into the habit of socializing with those I know – you know, "the ones that know your name." I adopted the conventional wisdom that the role of hospitality belonged to others: founding members of the parish, cradle Orthodox, or members of the hospitality committee. Fast forward to recent times: one Sunday during coffee hour, a couple new to our parish was expressing how hard it is to feel like they belong. Again, the thought of my article surfaced with the same question, "Why doesn't every church have a Sam and Mae?" Later as I reflected on our conversation, I realized what should have been obvious long ago: hospitality is everyone's job!

It doesn't belong to those who are cradle Orthodox. It doesn't belong to those older, retired members of the church. It doesn't even belong to the hospitality committee (if your church has one). We can be the "Sam and Mae" in our own churches. It is not the job of a few, but belongs to everyone.

The next time you are in church or at coffee hour, look around. Do you see an unfamiliar face? Introduce yourself. Show them a service book if they aren't familiar with the service. Ask them to join you for a cup of coffee. Encourage your kids to say hello to their kids. Offer them a place at your table. Pull them into your conversations. Learn their names so you can use their names the next time you see them. Be kind – emulate God's love and His mercy.

Thank you, Sam and Mae, for giving us a beautiful example of hospitality. Memory Eternal, Sam, and the newly departed handmaiden, Clara ("Aunt Mae") Salem!

Christi Ghiz
St. Joseph Church, Houston, Texas
Christi is a former member of St. George Orthodox Church, New Kensington, Pennsylvania, where she converted to Orthodoxy.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

ANDREWS, Deacon Andrew, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 8, 2019, at St. Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, California. Fr. Andrew is attached to St. Timothy Church, Fairfield, California.

CULVER, Colum (Douglas), to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on January 12, 2020, at St. Stephen Orthodox Church, Springfield, Massachusetts. He is attached to St. Stephen Church.

HYATT, David, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on January 12, 2020, at the Church of St. Philip, Souderton, Pennsylvania. Deacon David is assigned to St. Philip.

SIROTKO, Deacon Theodore, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on December 8, 2019, at St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is attached to the parish.

REPOSED

KINDER, Father Patrick, formerly of St. Ignatius/Madison, Wisconsin, and retired in Louisville, Kentucky, at his home January 14, 2020, following a long illness. He is survived by Khouria Vanessa and son Anthony.

Save the Date!

The Eastern Dioceses of the Antiochian Orthodox
Christian Archdiocese of North America invites all to our

2ND ANNUAL
SPRING RETREAT
& PILGRIMAGE

APRIL 3-5, 2020

ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE
CONFERENCE CENTER

Special sessions for members of Parish Council, YAM, SOYO, & DMC



GROWING INTO ORTHODOX MANHOOD

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival
for the Diocese of Worcester and New England

As I was preparing this oration a significant memory from my childhood came back to me, and I was flooded with emotion. It was a sweltering summer day in 2013. The AC and fans in the house did little to combat the oppressive heat. My Dad, with a scruffy five-o'clock-shadow, talked in a soothing, deep voice, as he demanded the focus of my nine-year-old sister on his left and attempted to attract my attention, a twelve-year-old boy, on his right. I was too busy anticipating the moment I could slink back into the

other room and continue playing Madden on the PlayStation. As was his Saturday ritual, we both waited our turn to read the Bible verse he had prescribed for us. One of us, usually my sister, was more patient than the other. Once my turn came, I sped through my appointed verse, and, to my chagrin, was required to reread it slowly and clearly. That day my verse was: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Little did I know that this would be one of the last treasures my father would bestow on me before being resurrected in Jesus Christ.

This verse appears as St. Paul is concluding his letter to the Church in Philippi. His goal is to encourage "continued unity, humility, selfless generosity, and joy in Christ" among the saints ("Introduction" in *The Orthodox Study Bible*). These young Christians faced a hostile world, equipped only with their faith. They were persecuted by many. Despite all of this, these Christians still followed Christ in the Spirit. The young Christians must have questioned their faith, even as I have. They, too, must have struggled with rejecting the ideas of their time to follow Jesus. For me, they are the real superheroes. They are the crowd I want to belong to.

Our topic defines me. Just as St. Paul put on



Christ and gets his strength, inspiration and life from Christ, so can I. I am literally one who relies on the strength of Christ to sustain and define me. The "I" in this verse applies to me as well as to St. Paul: I am obligated to both be "full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:12).

The "I" in this verse can be me, you, our families, and the Church, because Christ is in me, and all things. When Paul writes, "I can do all things," I am reminded that, just as Paul could "do all things through

Christ," so can I. So as long as my faith is rooted in Christ, then His strength for me to complete all things shall never fail. In this verse, the phrase "all things" means that Christ can give me the power to do anything. The idea, the suggestion, the possibility that a person could have the ability to "do all things" is absurd to the world of secularists. But what is folly to the world (1 Corinthians 3:19), Christ has shown in every generation. Our God is a God of miracles, miracles done by God through and in common people, who put their full faith in Him. These are miracles like that of Marytr Photina, who along with her family was being crucified for her faith when they were miraculously "freed from their crosses and healed" (daily readings). These are miracles, like those done by simple fishermen who through faith in God were able to say to a lame man at the Temple, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.... And so he [the lame man], leaping up, stood and walked and entered into the Temple" (Acts 3:6-7). These are miracles like the streaming icon of Mary which I was able to witness at the Antiochian Village. I can do all things, like St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who by the power of God went on an unfathomable mission and dedicated

his life to growing the Orthodox Church in North America. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:13 is a verse that has taught me about myself and about my faith. It is a verse that through self-reflection has taught me more about how I can be confident as the Orthodox man that I should be. It has taught me that being a strong, confident man is not about being independent and self-reliant, but rather about submitting to the will of God and recognizing that my strength comes from Him. This verse shows me that an Orthodox man should always be a child of God. Not a child whose only care is to beat the Giants on the PlayStation, but a child who has learned to put down the controller and spend and cherish the time he has with his spiritual Father and his family. From working in the Church, I can gain the strength and wisdom needed to complete His will for me. Therefore, it is time for me to "put away childish things" and become the Orthodox man my father hoped for me to be (1 Corinthians 13:11).

My father truly loved Philippians 4:13. It was a verse he lived by, and now my most cherished gift from him. My father also loved to work out, and to wrestle, and he was passionate about doing mixed martial arts. All of his strength and success, however, he attributed to God, and rightly praised God for them. Since the dawn of time, it has always been natural for children to believe that Superman was married to mom. Although I never witnessed my Dad shoot lasers out of his eyes, he always presented himself to us as confident and courageous. Underneath this strong veneer, I sensed that my father struggled with depression, self-loathing, and the same fiery darts of the wicked one that Saint Paul revealed to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:16). However, Dad's resilience and ability to rise above his own struggles in order to support his family showed me that truly he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. My father's mentoring of me was similar to Paul's encouragement of the Philippians. Paul, a man who had faced his own "thorn in the flesh," through Christ overcame his own personal struggles and taught new Christians the faith. Dad, a man who suffered from a weakened heart, overcame his personal struggles and taught the same faith to my sister and me.

This lesson of how Christ strengthens us would prove to be one of the last lessons Dad would give

me. It would be less than a year after that hot summer day when he would be taken in his sleep by a fatal heart attack. Forever, this verse will be Dad's gift for me to live by.

One of the most powerful and memorable verses of the Bible came as an encouraging reminder from a wise apostle to young Christians struggling in the world against demons and temptations. It is a reminder to "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10) and encourages me to trust that He will strengthen me to do all things. It is a reminder to me that no matter where I go, He is there, and only He has the power to enable my success. So, as I go off to college, and leave the safety of my family, both at home and in my church, I may face the same struggles as my father. I must remember during times of trials and tribulations, attacks of adversaries and aggressors, facing failures and temptations that, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Facing such times, my faith in Christ will help me to grow up to be the kind of man my father worked to make me. My father must know that because of his witness: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Giancarlo Crivelli, St. Stephens Church, Springfield, Massachusetts

Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?

The Department of Missions and Evangelism is now offering domestic mission trips for the summer of 2020. For our launch, we have partnered with Fr. Paul Abernathy and his awesome team at The Neighborhood Resilience Project (formerly known as FOCUS Pittsburgh). Learn more about what Fr. Paul is doing by watching his TEDx Talk in Pittsburgh at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcbu58p0fbA&feature=emb_logo

We have two sessions scheduled for July. Each session will provide an opportunity for training and service. Volunteers will return home with some ideas of how they might be catalysts for change in their own communities. Each "trip" is 6 days, with 2 days of travel, and 4 workdays, beginning with arrival on Wednesday and ending with departure the following Tuesday. The cost for food, lodging (at Duquesne University), and Catalyst training is only \$400 per person! For other details, including dates, fund-raising ideas, and registration, go to www.james218.com.

Please share this opportunity in the church bulletin and with your congregation by e-mail. If you have any questions, contact Dn. Adam Lowell Roberts at 615-971-0000.



COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

BISHOP ANTHONY VISITS SS. PETER AND PAUL CHURCH IN BEN LOMOND

Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Ben Lomond, California, was blessed by the presence of His Grace Bishop ANTHONY and delegates from Teen SOYO, the Young Adults ministry, and the Antiochian Women on the weekend of October 25–27th. Despite having no power for Saturday evening and all of Sunday, the weekend was a rousing success.

Bishop ANTHONY spoke after each of the services: Friday Vespers, Saturday morning prayers and the regular weekend services. Everyone commented how much they were blessed by his patristic, Scriptural teachings on the Holy Trinity, Christ's salvific work, Saint Demetrios, and so much more. He also spoke to each of the ministries and held an "Ask Sayidna" session with Teen SOYO. The bishop commented that he was impressed with some of the questions that were raised by the teens.

We finished the weekend off with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and the tonsuring of our *Protopsaltis*, Will Steiger, as Reader Nikodemos. Reader Nikodemos follows in the footsteps of his father, Father Basil Steiger's, in accepting his calling to Holy Orders.

Thanks are due to His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, both for blessing us by sending us Bishop ANTHONY, and for trusting us with this awesome and joyful responsibility; to all of

those who attended; to the Conference Planning and Coordination Committee for their help and guidance; and finally to all of the parishioners who put in hours of work preparing and then adapting to the black-out, especially Amanda Baillie and Sarah Steiger, our Co-Chairs. Glory be to God!

+Fr. Nathan
Ss. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church, Ben Lomond, California

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MIRACULOUS WEEPING ICON

The weekend of November 14–17, 2019, commemorated the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of "The Miraculous Weeping Icon at Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church of Cicero, Illinois," as it was designated in 1994 by Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory. Presiding over the entire celebration weekend was His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH. Also in attendance were His Grace Bishop ANTHONY and His Grace Bishop JOHN, visiting clergy from several churches across the country, Archdiocesan trustees, and many faithful from near and far.

On November 14, Father Fouad Saba, Saint George Church Pastor, led a delegation of clergy, laity, and Archdiocesan trustees (including local Trustees Mr. Mansour Rayan, Ms. Darlene Haddad, and Mr. Elie Haig) to greet His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Deacon John El-Massih, and Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice-Chairman of the

Antiochian Archdiocese Board of Trustees at O'Hare International Airport. The party enjoyed a welcome luncheon at the home of Archdiocesan Trustee and Parish Council Chair, Ms. Darlene N. Haddad. That evening, the Saint George Chapter of the Order of Saint Ignatius hosted a wine and cheese reception at the Church to educate the faithful on their philanthropic work, and begin the weekend festivities. In addition, His Eminence blessed the newly renovated Church Library and Conference Center.

On Friday afternoon, the Antiochian Women gathered for a delicious luncheon, where His Eminence addressed all in attendance. Later that evening, the church doors were opened for the faithful to enter the Shrine of the Miraculous Weeping Icon to venerate it. A *Paraklesis* service followed, culminating in the anointing of the faithful with the holy tears of the Theotokos by His Eminence and His Grace Bishop JOHN. Afterwards, the Young Adult Fellowship hosted a reception in the Church Hall. Finally, senior Chicago Trustee Mr. Mansour Rayan and his family hosted a private dinner at their home to welcome the Metropolitan, hierarchs, visiting clergy and trustees. His Eminence had the opportunity to visit the Rayan family chapel and bless the entire family.

Metropolitan JOSEPH began Saturday morning with a special breakfast with the members of Teen SOYO. After addressing the youth, His Eminence and Vice-Chairman El Khoury discussed



a variety of topics with the teens.

Metropolitan JOSEPH, joined by Bishops ANTHONY and JOHN, led a Chicago Deanery Meeting comprised of thirteen clergymen from six Churches to discuss important matters of Church ministry.

Many gathered Saturday evening for an elegant black tie Grand Banquet at the Carlisle Banquet Hall in Lombard. A harpist, violin trio, duet, and the Chesterton Seraphim Choir entertained the crowd. A Celebration Journal, consisting of photos and messages from dozens of families in the parish, was launched at the event. The inaugural Saint George Medal of Honor was bestowed upon the late monk, Brother Symeon, guardian of the Weeping Icon for five years. An oil painting, commissioned by Father Saba and completed by the hands of Jeanette Habash, a daughter of the parish, was unveiled at the Grand Banquet in commemoration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Weeping Icon and the Twenty-Year Memorial of Brother Symeon.

The entire weekend was crowned with the celebration of Orthros and the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH,

as he joyously welcomed His Eminence Metropolitan NATHANIEL of the Greek Metropolis of Chicago, His Grace Bishop ANTHONY of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest, and His Grace Bishop JOHN of Worcester and New England. The Church building overflowed with worshipping parishioners for a Liturgy filled with beauty, harmony, and joy. The Brother

Symeon Memorial Garden was blessed. It includes an outdoor shrine for the Miraculous Lady and the names of departed loved ones of the community. Thanks be to God! After Liturgy, 21 Saint George Church Members were inducted into the Order of Saint Ignatius, an historic Saint George Church moment.

A delicious luncheon hosted by Trustees Mr. Mansour Rayan, Ms. Darlene Haddad, and Mr. Elie Haig, was held after Liturgy in celebration of the visit of the Metropolitan, the bishops, clergy, and the Trustees Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice-Chairman, Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO, Mr. Dan Abraham, Mr. Roger David, Order Chairman, and Mr. William Morrison.

Later that evening, the Parish Council and weekend sponsors broke bread with His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and His Grace Bishop ANTHONY at a private function, giving thanks for a momentous and uplifting weekend celebration.

All weekend proceeds benefited the newly established "Saint George Future Fund," which, it is hoped, will begin the conversation about the long-term vision for Antiochian Orthodox ministry in Chicago.

As Father Saba stated throughout the weekend, we owed great thanks to a faithful Parish Council (led by Ms. Darlene N. Haddad), a dedicated committee (chaired by Mrs. Karen Nawas), the scores of generous sponsors, countless volunteers, and all who supported and attended the events. These all made for a truly historic weekend. It will be remembered by all those who desire to grow in the faith and to be themselves miracles in the world.

The four-day celebration brought together many generations of the Saint George Cicero community to commemorate a miracle which is still very much present in the lives of the members. Miracles continue to take place, bringing together the faithful in a unity of peace. Thanks be to God!

Please, visit the church Facebook page for a complete photo gallery of the entire weekend.

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH PRESIDES AT RETIREMENT CELEBRATIONS

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH visited St. Elias Cathedral, Ottawa, Ontario, from November 26 to December 1, 2019, to preside in the celebrations of the ministry of Archpriest Ghattas Hajal on the occasion of his retirement. It was a time full of blessings, in which the flock gathered around their chief shepherd to express their love to him and to Fr. Ghattas. Fr. Ghattas has served this parish for 28 years, and the Antiochian Archdiocese for almost 30 years, the majority of his 43 years in the holy priesthood.



Many events marked the occasion, including a luncheon at the Lebanese Embassy in Ottawa, hosted by His Excellency Fadi Ziadeh, Ambassador of Lebanon to Canada. The Ambassador honored His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and thanked Fr. Ghattas for his years of service.

In addition to the various midweek meals hosted by the faithful of the Cathedral, His Eminence presided over a special Parish Council meeting, which was followed by a dinner hosted by Council President George Hanna.

In a highlight of the week, His Eminence led a pilgrimage to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin Mary the Consolatory, in Lachute, Quebec. There, His Eminence was joined by His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER of the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York, and several clergy and faithful from the Ottawa and Montreal areas.

Metropolitan JOSEPH had desired to meet with the various ministries at St. Elias. Thus the weekend was delightfully packed with three separate meetings and Q&A sessions: one with the Antiochian Women, a second with the Youth Ministry Organizations (SOYO, YAM and OCF), and a third open to all the families and parishioners of the Cathedral. In these meetings, we saw a father meet with his children. The flock could feel His Eminence's Christian love through the effort and time he took to answer people's questions, and share his experiences and wisdom with them.

The weekend was also filled with worship. The Cathedral gathered for Great Vespers on

Friday evening, the feast day of St. Andrew the First-called Apostle, as well as for Great Vespers on Saturday evening, to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Later Saturday evening, the Cathedral hosted a gala celebration to mark the retirement from active ministry of Fr. Ghattas.

Over 500 people came to the gala to express their gratitude for the leadership, service and dedication of Fr. Ghattas. The parish prepared a short video tribute to Fr. Ghattas that highlighted his journey from the world of high finance and through the holy priesthood. The program featured several speakers who spoke lovingly of Fr. Ghattas, who in turn thanked His Eminence, his parish and his community for their support and love throughout the years. Sayidna JOSEPH concluded the evening by speaking of the appreciation he has for Fr. Ghattas, adding that he is worthy of the honor his flock has bestowed upon him.

On Sunday morning, His Eminence celebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Joining him were Fr. Ghattas Hajal, Fr. Joseph Purpura, Fr. James Griggs, Fr. Mark Wyatt, Fr. Milad Selim, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, Dn. John El Massih, Dn. Alexander Moisa and Dn.

Yakoub Daoura.

In his sermon, Sayidna JOSEPH again thanked Fr. Ghattas for his service to the Orthodox Church and to the Antiochian Archdiocese. Then, His Eminence appointed the Cathedral's assistant pastor, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, as the new Pastor and Dean, saying: "The trust is being transferred from one trustworthy priest to another trustworthy priest."

The final event of the week was a luncheon that followed the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, attended by over 550 people. St. Elias' Teen SOYO chapter members served as Masters of Ceremonies, and speeches were offered to thank Fr. Ghattas by the different youth ministries and all organizations of the parish. These shed light on Fr. Ghattas' pastoral work and contributions.

We pray that the Lord God will grant Fr. Ghattas many years of health in his retirement, and that He will bless the ministry of the new Pastor, Fr. Nektarios, and all the faithful of St. Elias Cathedral in Ottawa, through the prayers of our Holy Master and Chief Shepherd Metropolitan JOSEPH.

To see photographs from the events, go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/antiochianarchdiocese/albums/72157712078021877>



FR. JOSEPH HUNEYCUTT VISITS ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Fellowship of Lancaster County, a satellite community of St. John Chrysostom, York, Pennsylvania, invited V. Rev Father Joseph Huneycutt to celebrate Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. John Chrysostom on the evening of November 12, 2019. Thirty-five people attended. On Wednesday November 13, the group invited the local community to hear Fr. Joseph's presentation on the topic, "The Ancient Church Today," and over one hundred and ten people came. The group had only been anticipating fifty people! We are truly blessed to have had such a wonderful turnout for both Divine Liturgy and the presentation.

The St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Fellowship of Lancaster County has been meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month for Daily Vespers, fellowship and a Bible Study since October 2017. The Fellowship is under the guidance of V. Rev Father Peter Pier, and enjoys the blessing of His Grace Bishop THOMAS. The website for the group is elc-orthodoxy.org.



ORTHODOX WOMEN’S RETREAT 2019

Tonia Howell

After one has attended the annual Orthodox Women’s Retreat for a number of years, the smell of freshly baked cinnamon buns becomes synonymous with the welcome to another gathering of ladies anticipating a spiritual feast. We are always cautioned that “no meal will be served Friday evening,” but the “unexplained” emerging trays of all things delicious dispels any concern over hunger.

This year, our desire to be filled was made possible by the ministries of: Fr. Amin Houli from the Antiochian Church of the Annunciation in Calgary who served Friday’s molieben opening prayers; Fr. Patrick Yamniuk from St. Vladimir’s Ukrainian Orthodox

relating his experience riding in a “flying canoe” (an Air Cam). Following are some of the words of wisdom gleaned from his narrations.

In his first talk, he reminded us that our own image of success could differ greatly from God’s plan. It is very sobering to realize that we may be the “only Jesus that a person will ever meet.” Our struggle is to “step out of the way” and let Christ’s Light and Love shine through us, as did/do the Saints. The “dark night of the soul,” although experienced as a sense of God’s abandonment, allows for spiritual growth, often only seen in retrospect. He advised us that, in response to a family member who has strayed from

to leave, brought the hearts and hands of their many neighbours near and far to amply provide for the acreage and the raising of the buildings! From this we can learn, that, through the positive acceptance of the trials of life (our “martyrdom”) salvation is affected.

He also emphasised that our present joy in worship is essential to prepare us for heaven where we will praise without ceasing. In the Divine Liturgy we join with the Church Triumphant (those now in the eternal presence of Christ), which implies that, no matter how few may be attending a service, the temple will be filled with unseen saints. When distress makes it difficult to pray, we are to be silent before God, perhaps through venerating the icons, praying the Jesus Prayer, or making very brief pleas – “Lord, dispel my darkness.” We are to be angels unaware to others who suffer. With unbridled screen-use con-

present lack of inter-generational connectedness, and thus are countered by love and mercy. He spoke of the building up of the community (he referred to the Benedictine Option in the west) in the monastic life including the solitary monks who are connected through their common centre in Christ. Authentic Christian life involves faithfully showing forth our faith, without imposition. An example of this is consistently blessing our meal, even when in the presence of others who may not share our faith. In the Eucharist, the Mystical Presence of Christ cleanses our nous, the eye of the soul.

In the fourth session, he dwelled on forgiveness, especially addressing the question of how to forgive someone who has deeply wounded us; we are to consider God’s infinite mercy in forgiving the worst of our sins. We are to understand that only God knows the heart of the sinner. Conversely, we



Church who served Great Vespers and heard confessions on Saturday evening; Fr. Phillip Eriksson from St. Peter the Aleut (OCA) who heard confessions Saturday evening; and, Abbot Tryphon of the All Merciful Savior Orthodox Monastery in Washington, who spoke on the theme of “Incarnating Christ in Our World, An Exercise in Martyrdom” Fr. Abbot Tryphon also served Saturday Morning Prayers and Sunday Divine Liturgy.

Abbot Tryphon caught our attention and taught us by his excellent story-telling ability, including

the faith, we must not impose but show unconditional love, commit to unceasing prayer and express our faith gently in the loved ones presence.

His second presentation included the miraculous and heart-warming story of the provision for his monastery on Vashon Island. In the planning stages, an entrepreneur offered his services to construct the complex for a very reasonable fee, for which he received payment upfront. Devastation soon came when the realization set in that he had absconded with the money. Word of this, and the monks’ plans

tributing to our cultural disease, we were admonished to set limits. However, we Orthodox must redeem the use of social media; if we do not, we give the devil complete victory over this communication tool.

In his third talk, Abbot Tryphon counselled us to show non-judgemental compassion toward those who experience gender confusion, but to speak the truth in love should they desire Orthodox conversion. Suicidal tendencies arise from feelings of uselessness and hopelessness, including the

must not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by another’s unforgiveness. In closing, Abbot Tryphon assured us that, since God exists outside of time, He “heard our prayers even before we were born”.

Even if our final hour had not been spent in the dining room, we would have undoubtedly departed with a sense of our cup running over with the blessings of much food for thought and prayer and of the joy we shared in fellowship as sisters in Christ, from many different expressions within our beloved Orthodox faith.

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