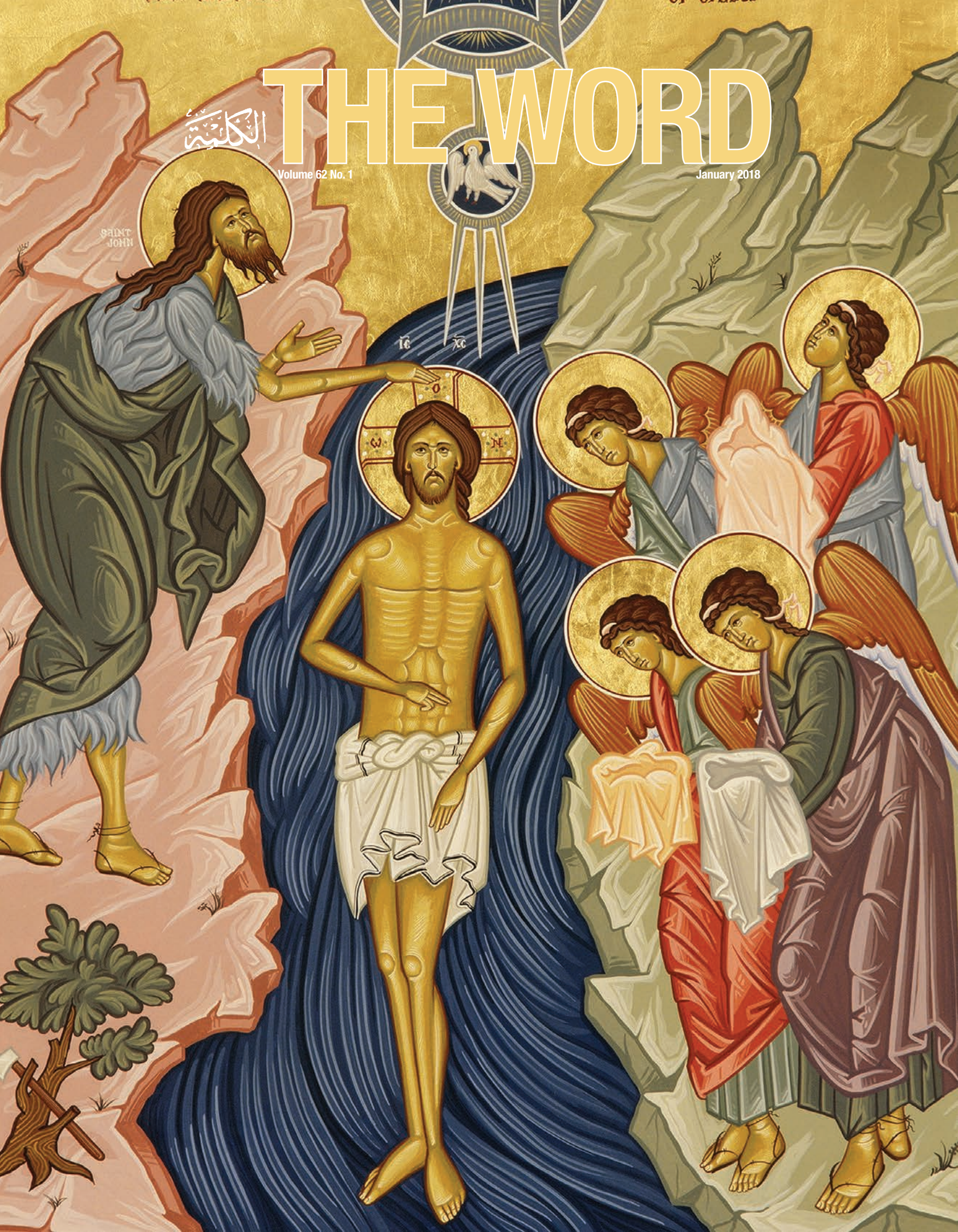


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THE WORD

Volume 62 No. 1

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contents

The Word



COVER: ICON OF THE THEOPHANY
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- 3 EDITORIAL
by Bishop JOHN
- 4 FROM THESE STONES –
DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS
AND EVANGELISM:
EXORCISM PRECEDES EVANGELISM
by Fr. Joseph Huneycutt
- 6 A HOLY TEMPLE
by Fr. Andrew Harmon
- 7 FROM THE HEARTH:
CLAIMING OUR CHILDREN
by Keidi Lewis
- 8 ORTHODOX VISION FOUNDATION
HOLDS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
by Fr. Joseph Huneycutt
- 9 BEARERS OF THE TRADITION
by Christopher Veniamin
- 11 HOW CLINICAL PASTORAL
EDUCATION (CPE)
TRANSFORMS SEMINARIANS
by Fr. Adrian Budica
- 14 WHY PRISON MINISTRY?
by Fr. David Randolph
- 17 ECUMENISM: THE AUTOIMMUNE
DISEASE IN “THE BODY OF CHRIST”
by Fr. John Oliver
- 22 GRACE THROUGH ANOINTING
by Michael Pagani
- 24 “NOT AS THOSE WHO
HAVE NO HOPE”
by Gregory Abdalah
- 27 THE HOPE OF THE HOPELESS
by Khouria Tammy Makoul
- 28 HOLY MATRIMONY?
by Fr. Daniel Daly
- 32 COMMUNITIES IN ACTION
- 34 ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

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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TODAY, SALVATION COMES TO OUR HOUSE

Today, we have reached the time of the feast, and the rank of saints gathereth with us, and the angels celebrate with men.
Today, the grace of the Holy Spirit hath descended on the water in the likeness of a dove.
Today, the Sun that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord.
Today, the moon shineth with the world in its radiant beams.
Today, the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendor of their radiance.
– Prayer for Theophany

Orthodox Christians encounter God today. The God we encounter revealed Himself as a babe in the Feast of the Nativity and as a man and God in this feast of Theophany. We meet this God who comes to us who have already read The Book, or at least the *Cliff Notes*. We encounter Him, knowing already the whole story of salvation. This God, born in a cavern, who lay in a manger, and now, in this feast, is experienced as a man beginning His ministry on earth, meets us in our time and place. When we meet Him, we choose how to respond to His coming to us. Do we make room for Him in our lives, accept Him as King and God, follow Him as disciples, suffer with Him in our flesh, and die with Him as faithful servants? Alternatively, do we carry on as if He has not yet come to us? This God allows us to choose how we shall respond. This God loves us and waits to hear from us.

When we celebrate each of the feasts, we meet Christ today as He came to us in history. Today He comes to us, His creation as a babe; vulnerable and weak. Will we make room in the caverns of our soul for Him? Today He comes to us as Man and God, who is revealed in the waters of the Jordan, witnessed by John the Baptist and his disciples. Will we join ourselves to Christ and His Father and the Holy Spirit? Today He comes to us as the teacher. Will we learn Truth? Today He comes to us in miracles? Will we follow Him? Today He sends us out into His world to share His good news. Will we be His apostles? Today He is rejected by the elite and many other people. Will we stand by Him and accept their

scorn? Today He is crucified. Will we die with Him? Today He Ascends, sits at the right Hand of the Father, comes in glory and judges the world. Will we stand steadfast?

Today we are called to be born anew. Again and again and again, the Church calls us to confess our sins, change our directions and accept our newness. The Church does this because she is the bride of Christ who is Her source. She is enlivened and guided by the Holy Spirit, who works in each of us. In the Church we encounter God, not just in heaven at the liturgies, not just in feeding us in our Sunday School classes, not just in meeting Him in our outreach to those in prison, the naked, the hungry, or the afflicted, but also in every encounter with Church members as we call upon God's name. She is Holy, She is God's, She is for us mother, and She is our source of Life in Christ.

We meet Him again today, and in every feast day. Let us receive Him, His Life, and whatever He has for us, in our worship, our learning, and our life together. And today, too, may the world “be lighted by the light of the Lord.”

Bishop JOHN



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FROM THESE STONES – DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

EXORCISM PRECEDES EVANGELISM

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

NOW THAT WE'VE CELEBRATED THE GREAT FEASTS OF NATIVITY AND THEOPHANY, MOST ORTHODOX PRIESTS ARE OCCUPIED WITH EXORCISMS, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS *HOUSE-BLESSINGS*. BEFORE THAT AUGUST AFFAIR, HOWEVER, COMES THE ANNUAL HOUSE-BLESSING HOUSE-*CLEANING*.

I remember once pulling up to a house and, after gathering my house-blessing gear, was walking up the sidewalk when the lady of the house threw open the front door and exclaimed: “Boy! Am I glad you’re here – I’m tired of house cleaning!”

Following the celebration of Christ’s baptism (January 6), the faithful should schedule a visit by the priest to bless their homes. All the rooms of the house are sprinkled with holy water with the chanting of the Apolytikion of Theophany in Tone 1:¹

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the likeness of a dove, confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

The priest, sprinkling the walls with holy water in the form of a cross, says: “By the sprinkling of this holy water, may every evil action and demon be put to flight in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” After this blessing, the inhabitants are blessed with the holy water: the husband, the wife, and the children – the oldest first. Any relatives and friends present are then blessed. In the case of the foundation of a home, or the blessing of a new dwelling, the service may also include anointing the walls, censuring, and other prayers. By sanctifying our homes, God’s grace is extended to our individual dwellings.

There’s more: a house-blessing, as the prayer of the priest indicates, is indeed an exorcism. I’ve often related the story of the time a TV news crew covered one of our house-blessings. While I was vesting, speaking with the cameraman while he was setting up his equipment, I spoke of how the service, especially the priest’s prayer, was an exorcism – expelling demons and their havoc by the holy water. He filmed us as we did the rite of house-blessing from beginning to end. Yet, when the news came on that evening, we were all a bit shocked when we heard the teaser: “A local family has the priest perform an exorcism to make their house a happy home again” As you can imagine, it was not exactly the story *we’d* imagined.

In his biography of St. Anthony, St. Athanasius the Great relates the following story:

The devil observed Anthony and gnashed his teeth against him. But Anthony, in the desert, was consoled by the Savior and continued unhurt by his wiles and varied devices.

As he was watching in the night the devil sent wild beasts against him. And almost all the hyenas in that desert came forth from their dens and surrounded him; and he was in the midst, while each one threatened to bite. Seeing that it was a trick of the enemy he said to them all: “If ye have received power against me I am ready to be devoured by you; but if ye were sent against me by demons, stay not, but depart, for I am a servant of Christ.” When Anthony said this they fled, driven by that word as with a whip.²

Would that I had such courage, fostered by fervent prayer and spiritual warfare, when tempted, to say: “Satan, be gone! I serve the Christ.”

Over two hundred years before the birth of St. Anthony the Great, Jesus told a little man in a tree, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and rich, came down and received Jesus joyfully. All the people murmured, because Jesus was going to the home of a man known to be a sinner. During that visit, this man stood before the God-Man and said, “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.” To which Jesus exclaimed: “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”³

You see that? A house-blessing, if you will; even an exorcism! This, friends, is why we have our homes blessed: to exorcise that which wars against the good. Homes are blessed to expel evil – brought about by our own actions, inactions, and lukewarm faith. These, by action of the holy water blessed by the Holy Spirit at Theophany, are cast out! Granted, it’s not like the Hollywood version of exorcism, where evil is glorified and the good is often downplayed. In the Church, we acknowledge the forces that war against us are very real – yet, they pale in comparison to the Good, which is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The word *theophany* means an appearance of God. The Feast, celebrated on January 6, reveals the Holy Trinity to the world; the Son is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and the Father says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This same Christ says to the repentant Zacchaeus, “Today salvation is come to this house.”

It follows in St. Luke’s account, that immediately after His baptism, Jesus began his public ministry. And one can assume, with certainty, that it was after *his*

house-blessing, this encounter with the Living Water, that Zacchaeus began his ministry.⁴

After Our Lord’s baptism, in the Gospel according to St. Mark, we read that the Spirit immediately drove Him out in to the wilderness. Thus, traditionally, house-blessings are completed by the time of the Great Fast. The story of Zacchaeus, which is read before Lent, is a fitting reminder that one should turn away from sins – *repent*. In this way, the Lenten journey should begin with a recognition of sins. As Zacchaeus sought to see who Jesus was, that same desire, an effort to see Christ, starts the movement, through Lent, toward Pascha.

Just as the prayers of exorcism are read over those about to be baptized, in order for us to share the Good News, turning toward God and way from evil is essential. Exorcism is the first movement of salvation. Which raises the question: Did the TV report get it right about our house-blessing, that a local family had theirs exorcised, so that it would become a happy home again? Yep.

Consider the story of the demoniac from whom our Lord cast out a legion of demons. Unlike Zacchaeus, the townspeople were not seeking the Lord and did not receive Jesus joyfully. Rather, they asked Him to leave, but the man whom Jesus healed begged that he might go with Him. Jesus sent him away, saying, “‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.”⁵

As with the man now made whole, so it is with us. Whether it is the first time we have our home blessed or the annual exorcism, now is the time. Now is the time, as we winter toward Lent. Now is the time, as we still glow from the Babe born in a cave. Now is the time, as the joy still lingers from the Lord’s baptismal waters. Now is the time ... for us to declare how much God has done for us!

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt, Vice-Chairman
The Department of Missions and Evangelism

1. During the Theophany season (January 6 through the Leave-taking on January 14) the festal Apolytikion, “When Thou, O Lord wast baptized ...,” is chanted repeatedly throughout the house-blessing; but should the house-blessing take place after the Leave-taking, the Apolytikion of the Cross (also in Tone 1), “O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance...,” is chanted, rather than that of Theophany.
2. <http://www.stmarkchicago.org/St-Anthony-The-Great.pdf>
3. Luke 19:5-10.
4. After the Ascension of the Lord, St. Zacchaeus accompanied St. Peter on his travels. Tradition holds that he followed St. Peter to Caesarea, where Peter appointed him Bishop of Caesarea and Palestine.
5. Luke 8:26-39.

“A HOLY TEMPLE”

EPHESIANS 2:21

Fr. Andrew Harmon

A sermon delivered
November 19, 2017, at
St. Matthew Orthodox
Church, North Royalton,
Ohio, after the church
caught fire on
November 11.

For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2: 14–22

In ancient Greece, Sparta was one of the top city-states, often the strongest city in the land. One of the kings of Sparta loved to boast to other Greeks about how strong his city walls were: no one could break through them. Once, one of the men to whom he had boasted about this was visiting the king in Sparta. The king gave his guest a tour. The guest said, “Your majesty, you always brag about the strength of your walls, but I don’t see any walls at all!” The king pointed to soldiers of his army who were standing nearby and said, “These *men* are the walls of Sparta –and every one of them is a brick in the wall. They are a wall that is unbreakable!” (from Father Anthony Coniaris’s *The Orthodox Church*, p. 8).

You are the walls of God’s Church!

This is the first time we are having our own Sunday liturgy after our horrible fire on November 11. The epistle lesson assigned for today, Ephesians 2:14–22, is incredibly appropriate. When I checked the lectionary a few days ago, and then looked up this passage, it was unbelievable that it was the passage for today. Almost like it was planned that way ... and I suppose it was, by the Lord.

We just heard the entire passage read. Let’s look at it more closely, in particular, at Verse 19, in which the Apostle tells us that we are fellow citizens with the saints in God’s household. In Verse 20, he tells us that Christ is the chief cornerstone of that house, and that the apostles and prophets are its foundation. In Verses 21–22, he writes that *you*, the people of God, are built into that structure

of God’s household, God’s church. ***You*** are the wall built upon the cornerstone (Christ) and the foundation (the apostles and prophets). What does it all end up being? Verse 21: “a holy temple in the Lord,” and Verse 22: “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Sparta’s soldiers were the walls of that city. We are the walls of God’s Church, of His “holy temple.” For the first three hundred years of the history of our Orthodox Christian Church, we didn’t have church buildings. That is because our faith was illegal. Our spiritual forefathers had liturgy wherever they could – out in a field, in someone’s home, in underground hiding places. They basically had church wherever they could get away with it, wherever they could keep it secret from the government.

Once our Church, however, was legalized by St. Constantine, the Emperor in 313 A.D., we started making church buildings, right away, and everywhere. Temples to God sprang up all over. Church buildings are very important – we’ve sure learned that in the last eight days!

For many reasons a building is important. Here are just a few:

- physical temples are beautiful places to do the most important thing in life: worship God;
- physical temples provide a good way for us to express our love for God, by making the place beautiful where we gather to worship Him; and
- church buildings provide a good place for the many things parishes do – fellowship, learning, a base for ministries to help the poor, and so forth.

A building is very important, as we’re now finding out. Yet ... a church without a *church building* is still a church. St. Paul wrote that epistle to the church in Ephesus. They didn’t have a building, and they would not have one for about 250 years after St. Paul wrote them. Still, they were obviously a church when the Apostle wrote them, building or not.

I don’t say any of this to downgrade the importance of church buildings or physical temples. They are incredibly important, as I have found out this past week! People have asked me, “Father, where is your office now?” To which I reply, “In my car.” It’s tough!

More important than the practical aspects is the loss of the peace and beauty and holiness of the nave and sanctuary of our building. A priest’s life is busy and stressful. A priest can get pretty frazzled, even working right in the

office. A nice advantage of being at the church so much, when I would be getting too frazzled, was that I could just walk into the church and spend a few minutes in worship and prayer, knowing the peace that entering God’s house to pray brings. That was a wonderful thing, and I miss it very much. So a church building is really, really important and that’s why I really hope it won’t be too long. We are told, however, that it could be up to a year.

So when we get too sad about the fire, today’s epistle lesson can help us keep a good perspective. In Verse 21, St. Paul writes about God’s “holy temple.” Was he referring to a church building those Ephesian Christians had? No: they didn’t have any church building, and they wouldn’t have one for about another two and a half centuries. So, then, if they had no church building, what was God’s holy temple in the city of Ephesus? It was the Christians of Ephesus. So what is God’s holy temple for the Christians of St. Matthew’s? *You are!*

During our current period of hardship, not having a building (which will not be brief), let us remember Verse 21 of today’s epistle reading: the structure, God’s holy temple, is “joined together” according to St. Paul. It is like bricks in a wall, joined together to make that wall stand straight and strong. Each one of us is one of the bricks “joined together” by Christ. Each of us is put together by Christ to make His temple. So we need to work together, as bricks work together to make a building.

There is lots of stress and strain on our “wall” right now, so we “bricks” have to stay united in Christ. If a bad storm hits a building, the wall can hold up because the bricks hold together and the building is unmoved by the storm. Now we have *our* storm. You are the bricks of God’s Church, of our parish. We will stick together, pray together, and work together. With God’s help, we will be unmoved by the storm. We, however, should do more than just remain unmoved: we should end up a better parish, a better temple of God.

Imagine years from now, let’s say, the 75th anniversary of our parish’s founding (which would be about 45 years still in the future, so some of us wouldn’t be around for that celebration!). When parishioners at that time reminisce about parish history, when they talk about various things that happened over the years, when people talk about various high points in the church’s history, perhaps they will say: “When was the biggest and best turning point? It was that fire back in 2017.”

I think that will be true because we are going to stick together as bricks in God’s temple. And God will work through all that has happened to make our parish, this particular holy temple of God, even better than before.

FROM THE HEARTH CLAIMING OUR CHILDREN

by Keidi Lewis

The music of Swan Lake swells, wands, wielded by leaping five-year-olds, swish through the air, while I type madly on my laptop. I am the only parent present at Ballet Camp today, amidst the ruffles: all the other attendees were dropped off without much ado, and their parents are out running errands, or having a few hours to themselves. Someday I will gladly join them, but my ballet-loving daughter desperately wants to be at ballet camp. She is not ready to dance without me in the vicinity. This small sacrifice – ballet-nearness duty – is made more trying by the fact that my older daughters are at their own camp this week.

I’m painfully aware that I could have had – would have had, almost had – three hours to take care of my own agenda, to get tasks done on my own, by myself, solo, all week long. Not this year, apparently. That’s okay, because of the joy I see in my youngest, as she twirls, jumps, and occasionally glances over at me to smile proudly. It’s okay, because I know she’s not emotionally manipulating me or trying to take advantage; she is just not ready to be left on her own. It’s okay, because, while there are things I could be getting done (not to mention just relaxing and having some time to myself), I have the spare time this week to delay my agenda and be with her. Setting aside my plans and being present for ballet camp makes it possible for a shy five-year-old to step out into the world at her own pace, without worry or insecurity, and is one way that I show her my love in a practical, tangible, sacrificial way.

We follow the example of Jesus, whose life is an exhortation to show our love, not just with words, but with actions. For our kids, this laying-down-your-life kind of love means playing make believe, or going for a walk with them, or stopping to listen with our full attention when they are excited about telling us something. As God’s love for us was expressed in sacrifice and co-suffering, so do our children know our love for them when it is expressed sacrificially. St. John Chrysostom writes: “Let everything take second place to our care for our children, our bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Children are not an accessory to enhance the lives of their parents. Children are not supporting players in the parents’ story: parents’ most important role is as a supporting player in the story of the child. What’s more, children who feel loved by their parents, valued by them, and connected to them, listen more carefully and are more likely to adopt their parents’ viewpoints and values. This is where the most direct correlation between children choosing “the faith of their fathers” comes in: with attachment.

To have a relationship with God that endures, children greatly benefit from the foundation of an enduring relationship with their parents. They need to feel that their parents have “got their back” first and foremost. Children, as part of the family unit, come before personal glory of any kind, before work, even before anything we might think of as “God’s work,” including the Church. Our children must not be sacrificed for any preventable reason, for to do so would put their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



But a church
without a church
building is still a
church. St. Paul wrote
that epistle
to the church in
Ephesus.

ORTHODOX VISION FOUNDATION HOLDS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

For more information about the Conference, go to www.orthodoxvisionfoundation.org.

From September 21 to 24, 2017, Orthodox Vision Foundation (OVF) sponsored an Advanced Leadership Initiative Conference entitled “For the Life of the World” at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. It has been called by many of the pre-selected 65 attendees “historic,” and “ground-breaking.” They were welcomed to the program by Co-Trustee of OVF Charles Ajalat, and Archpriest Chad Hatfield, President of St. Vladimir’s Seminary. The goals of the Conference were to advance leadership skills and deepen faith and bonding among the attendees, to improve Orthodox ministries, to mentor younger Orthodox, and to help those who someday might want to transition from the profit to the non-profit world. In a two-hour reflection session, the attendees expressed their excitement and joy with what had transpired at the Conference, and commented on how inspiring it had been.

Speakers at the Conference included committed Orthodox CEOs and current and former executives and professionals, including the President of Chick-fil-A, Inc.; the CEO of Kinder Morgan (one of North America’s largest energy infrastructure companies); one of the top ten business bloggers in the U.S. and former CEO of Thomas Nelson (the world’s largest Bible publisher); a former VP of Planning for Exxon Mobil Asia-Pacific; great theologians; major philanthropists; and heads of Orthodox schools and colleges, including a former Dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School who had been part of a \$1.2 billion capital campaign and who taught fundraising at the Conference. Corporate communications was taught by the recently retired head person in that area for Koch Industries. The CEOs of three major Orthodox charities presented their future goals, obstacles to achieving them, and planned solutions, for critique by attendees. There was also a talk on the role of the laity in the Church by a layperson experienced in that area, a talk on transitioning from the profit to the non-profit world by an expert in that area, and a talk by a bishop of the Church, who had headed an ecclesial external affairs office in Washington, D.C. Two bishops, an archbishop and a metropolitan, offered prayers and remarks.

Representation by participants from 27 cities was equally exciting. Statistically, 90 percent were laity; one-third were female; 20 percent were 40 years old and under;

and approximately 30 percent were from each of the three largest Orthodox jurisdictions. Among the outstanding participants were many philanthropists and executive directors of philanthropic organizations; a 29-year-old founder and CEO of a start-up working on the early detection of cancer (which has procured \$65 million of equity investment and was one of Forbes’s “30 under 30 in Healthcare”); key educators and church leaders; the “Bible Answer Man”; an executive of a major golf club manufacturer; CEOs of equity capital firms; book publishers; a manufacturing firm, real estate firm, and construction firm; media, marketing, and Internet specialists; prominent lawyers from major firms; and prominent doctors, engineers, and consultants.

Attendees also viewed the screening of the Orthodox, full-length, professional film, *Becoming Truly Human*, and heard a brief introduction of the film from its director/star. (The film, which is directed toward millennials and “nones” was released by the Antiochian Archdiocese and was made available September 6 to Amazon’s 66 million subscribers. It is also on iTunes, GooglePlay, Xbox, and Vudu. A second distribution company, which distributed Scorsese’s recent film, *Silence*, is also distributing *Becoming Truly Human* in many of its one thousand venues.)

Dioceses of Oakland/Charleston & New York/Washington D.C.



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Excerpted from a report on the Antiochian House of Studies to the Board of Trustees of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, November 3–4, 2017

The Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) is our Department for advanced theological education. Led since the 1970s by our President, Fr. Joseph Allen, the Department has accomplished a great deal. Its chief purpose is to train both clergy and laity in the God-bearing tradition of the Antiochian Patriarchate, so as to serve the needs of the Church in North America. This is done by focusing on the biblical and patristic ethos of the age-old tradition of the Orthodox faith.

Some of our programs focus on education for people who are not able to go to seminary for three years, but who sincerely desire an Orthodox Christian education and training. We have 37 years of experience offering distance-learning and hybrid programs in graduate theological education. The benefits to the Archdiocese of these programs are obvious, because we are sending our students back to the parishes with new energy – people who can teach church school, direct choirs, lead the youth and minister to the aged better and with more confidence than they could before.

ACCREDITATION BY THE ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS (ATS)

For a number of years now, the House of Studies’ Master’s degree in Applied Orthodox Theology has been offered jointly with the School of Theology in the University of Balamand. It is our earnest intention that this special partnership continue. With the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, the House of Studies has begun the process of accreditation in North America, and has submitted its application for Associate Membership to the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). ATS is the leading accreditation agency for graduate theological education in North America. Accreditation will enable the House of

Studies to bestow its own nationally and internationally recognized graduate theological degrees. We will then be able to offer an accredited Ph.D. degree.

Today, literally hundreds of people from all over the world (including Africa, Australia, China, and New Zealand) have benefitted from a House of Studies’ education. They are now serving the Church in many and varied ways. Accreditation means official recognition from other accredited institutions of graduate theological education in North America. This status would acknowledge that the House of Studies is operating with academic, institutional, and financial integrity; and that the educational standards of AHOS are comparable to those of the best institutions of graduate theological learning.

Full accreditation, which takes about five years to attain, would raise the national and international prestige of the House of Studies, and give it a new lease on life. By its acceptance into the community of ATS-accredited schools, awareness of the presence of AHOS in North America would increase dramatically. This would attract more students and high-quality faculty and staff, and inspire all constituencies with confidence in the integrity and high standards of the School.

Furthermore, accreditation would underline the marketability of the degree programs that the School offers. It would make the School eligible, too, for State and Federal support in the form of student loans, the deferral of student loans, funding through the Veterans Administration’s GI tuition programs, research grants, and so on. *Significance of the AHOS Graduate Degree Programs*

The Antiochian House of Studies currently offers two Master’s degree programs and one Ph.D. program. We have an M.Th. in Applied Orthodox Theology, and (more recently) an M.Th. in Pastoral Counseling. Both are excellent and successful programs.

THE PH.D. IN ORTHODOX STUDIES

I would like to add a special word about the House of Studies’ Ph.D. program, which I have helped to establish and develop. First of all, the Ph.D. Program in Orthodox Studies is a unique program that distinguishes us from all the other Orthodox theological schools in America, and beyond. To this day, none of our other Orthodox Schools in North America has an independent Orthodox Ph.D. program. The mission of the House of Studies Ph.D. program is as follows:

- 1. To emphasize the Orthodox biblical and patristic tradition, which is the only foundation that can bring stability to our Church, and to the world;
- 2. To emphasize the Orthodox ethos, which can only be passed on from person to person. This is achieved by forming personal relationships between instructors and students during Residential Intensives, and by means of modern technologies via the Internet;
- 3. To emphasize the spiritual life of the Orthodox Church, which is inextricably intertwined with the teachings of the Church, and which is in fact the source of our dogmatic consciousness.

The spiritual life of the Church is what enables us to appreciate the practical significance of her doctrines. Discovering the *inner life* of the Church is the only way towards healing both ourselves and this broken world in which we live.

In short, we need specialists in the Orthodox faith who are not only trained to the highest scholarly standards, but who are also filled with the genuine Orthodox ethos. We need bearers of that Tradition which is handed down from generation to generation. We do not need dry intellectuals. We need people who are the salt of the earth and who, by their instruction and their lives, will initiate others into the mysteries of God, and inspire them also to become the salt of the earth.

Equally important, we need specialists who are able to enter into dialogue at the highest intellectual level with people of other confessions and philosophical traditions, Christian and non-Christian. We need people who can represent us, people who are capable of engaging in fruitful dialogue with the various sections of our society.

CONCLUSION

We have every reason to be proud of our School – the Antiochian House of Studies – and to support it by our prayers, by our word (by talking to our friends and family about it), and by our financial support.

Christopher Veniamin,
D.Phil. (Oxon.)
Professor of Patristic Theology and Dogmatics, and
Dean of the Antiochian
House of Studies

FROM THE HEARTH cont'd

FROM PAGE 6

salvation in peril. It would cause them to ask, “Who is this God and why should I care about Him? Why would God give me parents who are always doing their own thing, for whom I am an afterthought?” The children of many a missionary, priest, or pastor have to work out: “Why would I believe in a God who has caused my parents to forsake me for the good of His Church?” Children have to have our priority, our time, our attention, and our sacrificial love.

Most parents bond easily in the first years of their child’s life, in part because of the intensity of the needs of babies and toddlers, but they find that it becomes increasingly difficult to stay attached as their children reaches middle and high school. The transition from child to young adult sometimes becomes a severing of the connection between parent and child. Unfortunately, modern American culture leads us to believe that this is inevitable. It absolutely isn’t. When children enter the tumultuous teenage years, they need their parents more, not less. There is a misconception that parents can back off as their child exerts what looks like independence or resistance to parental influence, and leave the job of raising them to coaches, youth leaders, teachers, and now, more than ever, the Internet. If parents are not present for them emotionally during this critical time, children connect with whoever is available, most often their equally misguided peers.

There is wisdom to be borrowed from the book: *Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* (2004), by Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté. The book is based on the human need for attachment: children need to connect to parents, to “orient” to them, to look to parents to make sense of the world and guide them through it. If parents aren’t available for attachment, children will fill the attachment void with their peers. “Peer orientation,” the term used in the book, is just what it sounds like: children become attached to their peers and guided by them, and not their parents. What their peers think and value becomes more important than the opinions and values of their parents. What many call a teenager’s behavioral problems would better be called a relationship problem. While some take this to mean a child’s peer group is all-important, even more important is for parents to *stay* attached to their teenagers.

Though it’s never too late, the easiest way to navigate adolescence is to remain attached as small children grow into teenagers. Just as God claims us with His love, we get to claim and reclaim our children at every age. We connect with them again and again with our presence and attention and sacrifice. This is why, even when a few precious hours without children sounds inordinately thrilling, I give my dancing daughter the gift and comfort of my proximity. May God bless us as we follow Jesus’s example of sacrificial and co-suffering love, and endeavor to bring our children into His Kingdom.

HOW CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION (CPE) TRANSFORMS SEMINARIANS

Father Adrian Budica

SINCE 2012, ST. VLADIMIR’S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY HAS REQUIRED ALL OF ITS MASTER OF DIVINITY (M.DIV.) STUDENTS TO GO THROUGH A TRAINING PROGRAM KNOWN AS “CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION,” COMMONLY KNOWN AS “CPE.” SO, BESIDES LEARNING CORE SUBJECTS LIKE NEW TESTAMENT, LITURGICS, AND CHURCH HISTORY, SEMINARIANS ARE REQUIRED TO SPEND 400 HOURS VISITING PATIENTS IN A HOSPITAL AND REFLECTING UPON THEIR EXPERIENCES UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF A CERTIFIED CPE SUPERVISOR, IN ORDER TO BE CREDITED WITH ONE UNIT OF CPE.

So far, 16 Antiochian seminarians and graduates at St. Vladimir’s have completed at least one CPE unit, and many claim the experience has totally transformed their pastoral approach. That’s because CPE uses a methodology that demands a lot of self-reflection and peer group assessment. Students don’t just visit a patient in the hospital and leave; they go back to their peer group and discuss their encounter: they analyze it, open it up for discussion among their fellow students, and receive direction from a clinical supervisor. A simple hospital visit becomes the object of intense scrutiny, undergoing microscopic analysis, in order to help seminarians enhance their pastoral care and to refine their methods of communication. (See “Defining ‘Clinical’ ‘Pastoral’ ‘Education,’” by Fr. Adrian Budica.)

“I went into CPE with mixed expectations,” says third-year Seminarian Subdeacon Herman Fields. “I expected patient visits to be a positive experience because I’m naturally outgoing, but I expected the student discussion groups to be unpleasant. In any event, my supervisor engendered constructive conversations within the group,” he noted, “And I learned a great deal about pastoral ministry.

“At the end of the summer, I found the work so meaningful that I was actually sad to leave the hospital!” he admitted. “I would walk from room to room in the ER, seeing who wanted to chat. I found it to be such a privilege to be present with those people in their time of crisis.

“I compare those encounters,” he remarked, “to the icon of the Mother of God holding the Christ Child. Like Mary, my task may have been ostensibly to nurture someone, but at the same time, I found Christ in the person of the patient, and I found that I walked away having been blessed *by them*.

“My own program was a welcome and needed complement to the resources available here at St. Vladimir’s in pastoral education,” he concluded.”

Seminary alumnus Rami Dahdal (M.Div. ’15), who is now a chaplain at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas, concurs. “Hands down,” he affirms, “the CPE program at St. Vlad’s was one of my best experiences during my studies.” Seminarian Rami completed one unit of CPE during the summer after his first year at St. Vladimir’s, at Banner University Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona, and then finished a residency at Wesley after he graduated.

“I pursued a CPE Residency,” he explained, “because I wanted to become a better communicator. As a chaplain I was exposed to various situations – both joyous and traumatic. The residency program taught me how to maneuver in those events, and how to communicate effectively to family, staff, and co-workers.

“All the educational material was done in addition to our weekly patient visits,” he noted. “We worked anywhere from 40 to 48 hours a week, and one of those days was a 24-hour shift. It was an intense program, but one filled with accomplishment and growth when it was over.”

In the current student body at St. Vladimir’s, 16 seminarians who have completed their first unit of CPE have spent more than 6,400 hours in training and supervised



Father Adrian Budica, Director of Field Education and supervisor of CPE at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, and CPE supervisor and manager, Spiritual Care and Education Department at Bridgeport Hospital, Bridgeport, CT



Father Adrian Budica (fourth from left) with first-year seminarians, ready to visit Westchester County Correction Facility, Valhalla, New York, as part of their prison ministry required fieldwork [photo: Alexandru Popovici]

clinical settings and have visited more than 15,000 patients in hospitals and nursing homes. Moreover, more than 100 alumni of St. Vladimir's have now completed at least one unit of CPE.

The Reverend Adrian Budica, director of Field Education and supervisor of CPE at the Seminary, is the person who prepares students to venture to their off-site hospital CPE training. Father Adrian, who himself is certified by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) as a CPE Supervisor, is using the CPE model to direct students in all of their field education venues at the Seminary – prison ministry for first-year students; hospital and nursing home visitations for second-year students, and parish assignments for third-year students.

"I am blessed," remarked Fr. Adrian, "to prepare the students before they enroll in their CPE off-site programs, and then I meet with them individually after they complete their CPE unit, and I observe their transformation. I track each student and collect information, including comments on their experiences at their exit interviews.

"Now more than ever, since St. Vladimir's instituted this requirement in 2012, faculty and administrators have become convinced that this kind of pastoral formation cannot simply happen in a purely academic setting," he asserted. "We could never foster the same pastoral formation in a theoretical course on pastoral theology, or through a required reading list."

Because of the exceptionally transformative experiences he's been hearing about from seminarians, Fr. Adrian is preparing to launch CPE training at St. Vladimir's to a new level: he is officially pursuing ACPE accreditation. This would make St. Vladimir's Seminary a CPE Satellite, enabling seminarians to earn CPE units under his supervision while performing their currently required prison ministry, hospital, and parish ministry field education.

"That's good news," says Fr. Adrian, "because once St. Vladimir's becomes a satellite and then a CPE center, seminarians will have the opportunity to earn up to 3 CPE units as part of their seminary degree." Then, they will have two major advantages: one, they will have received extraordinary pastoral skills, and two, they will be on their way to becoming Board Certified Chaplains. They can use these advantages as parish priests, or as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, military installations, and so forth.

Father Andrew Honore, currently a third-year seminarian and active military chaplain, who is also assigned as interim pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church in South Glens Fall, New York, now realizes the advantage of CPE training. He was willing to openly share his recent CPE experience, completed at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Hospital in California. (*The interview can be heard in its entirety on the Ancient Faith Radio podcast series, Wounded Healer.*)

"In all honesty, I was not particularly excited about completing my first unit of CPE, because it is a very large time commitment," said Fr. Andrew. "And, I expected the training to be 'touchy-feely,' without a lot of concrete things to learn as far as being a pastor. But I was proven very quickly to be very wrong.

"It ended up being boot camp for pastoral care training," he admitted, "and the group sessions ended up being the more impactful moments for me.

"Diving deep into myself and having others do the same is a really difficult thing," he recalled. "I had to learn about what, in my own past experience, was really keeping me from *hearing* a patient, from giving them the space to talk about their sickness and grief; I discovered that I had to confront my own dislike of pain – which was exhausting.

"I thank God for the group that I was in," he said. "We recognized we were there for a purpose, and we stuck to that purpose. It was a unique opportunity, a unique time in my life."

Father Adrian added, "We not only hope, but we also *know*, that students transformed by CPE act as catalysts for our wider Church, inasmuch as they touch thousands of lives as church leaders.

"Echoing the Parables of the Talents and the Sower in the Gospel," he went on, "we will continue to train our seminarians in CPE because we witness the return such investment brings: thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold."

DEFINING "CLINICAL" "PASTORAL" & "EDUCATION"

It is not uncommon for people to give me a blank stare when I answer their question, "What do you do at St. Vladimir's?" with the words "Clinical Pastoral Education." For some, those descriptive words are completely new. For others, they are confusing; zeroing in on the term clinical, they quizzically ask: "What? So now you're training doctors at St. Vladimir's Seminary?"

Such confusion, actually, has given me a starting point for a clarifying discussion each fall semester, as I offer my "Introduction to CPE" presentation to incoming students. I focus on each word: clinical, pastoral, education.

I ask them, "What do you think of when you hear the word clinical?" Student responses range from "best practices" to "clinical trials," to anything relating to the medical world. Facilitating the ensuing conversation, I remind them that the clinical process can be long and can entail several steps of evaluation and re-evaluation. I ask rhetorical questions to get them thinking, like: "When you go for a blood test, is that the end of it?" Eventually, they realize that the clinical process demands appropriate follow up and measured intervention: for example, medication given too much, too little, too often, too seldom, may slow down or even stop the healing process. To be "clinical" implies presenting a problem, diagnosing it, following up on it, troubleshooting, and eventually resolving it.

Students are always more self-assured when defining the second word, pastoral. They refer to the word's Latin root, (pastor,-is), which means "shepherding," and they relate the word to the passage in the Gospel of John that speaks of Christ as the "Good Shepherd" (John 10), who leads His flock and sacrifices Himself on their behalf. Some even recall the reading during Holy Week from Ezekiel 34, where God rebukes the false shepherds for what they were expected to do but did not: "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you

have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd." To be "pastoral" implies being caring, protective, and selfless.

When we get to the word education, we begin to make connections among the three words. Using the method typically associated with "Clinical Pastoral Education," we create a learning environment in which the pastoral caregiver will have the opportunity to present, reflect upon, and measure his or her spiritual care, in a small group setting of peers. Caregivers will also learn much about their own interior life in the process, and how the state of their own soul can impact an outcome when engaging a patient! "Education" implies a process involving continual pastoral formation.

How is this done? Seminarians visiting hospital patients as part of their required CPE training will come back to their peer group of student chaplains for debriefing. They will present a verbatim (summary of the conversation) of their visit. Then, they will ask the group to analyze their interaction with the patient, allowing not only their engagement with the patient but also their own inner thoughts and feelings to come "under the microscope." Next, they will receive a medicinal "prescription," or critique, from their peers in order to correct what did and did not go well during the interaction. And finally, they will apply the suggested conversational "medicine" during their next engagement with that same, or another, patient.

Gradually, our seminarians will learn that this "Clinical Pastoral Education" model, this clinical method of learning – action, reflection, new action – will be of utmost value to them. They can apply it to any pastoral setting: from visiting patients in the hospital or nursing home, to ministering to prisoners, to coordinating a parish council meeting, to becoming an attentive Father Confessor!

Fr. Adrian Budica
CPE Supervisor
St. Vladimir's Seminary



WHY PRISON MINISTRY?

IT IS A BIBLICAL MANDATE.

Matthew 25:34–40 is an eloquent account by Jesus of the end times and the gathering of the nations for judgment. He speaks of how we have dealt with the last, the least, and the lost, and even more, as we listen with our hearts:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you

a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:34–40).

Sometimes, it seems, we read a portion of scripture and wait for it to engage us somehow. Other times, we become engaged in the world and in the lives of others and are reminded of scripture verses which increase our involvement and lead us deeper into living more faithfully.

WHY DOES OUR ARCHDIOCESE HAVE A DEPARTMENT OF PRISON MINISTRY?

First and foremost, it is because of our love for Christ, and in Christ, and His love works through us! But why would God love criminals? you may ask. Jesus answered that question long ago when He said, “It is not the healthy who need a

doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32). What’s more, “this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22–24).

It seems that God has a special love and concern for the salvation of those who need Him the most. The religious leaders of His day had a hard time understanding this. They grew annoyed when a woman with a sordid background came into the home of a Pharisee where Jesus was dining. She stood behind Him, weeping, kissing His feet and washing them with perfume and tears. And she wiped them with her hair.

“When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner’” (Luke 7:39).

Jesus replied, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give Me any water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:44–47).

Criminal behavior is not very lovable. Therefore, it takes a special kind of love to have compassion on those who have caused so much suffering. Nevertheless, we are not running a prison inmate advocacy program. We are running a Jesus Christ advocacy program! Only He has enough love to forgive that which is humanly unforgivable.

While in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote to the church, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:5–8).

We are dedicated to the obedience and service of Jesus Christ. We see ourselves as mere links in God’s holy chain. For it has been our experience that the Lord uses many various people from different walks of life, to achieve His objectives.

That’s because it is not His desire for humans to get the credit for the work that the Holy Spirit accomplishes. Perhaps that is the reason why God chose to begin His church on

earth with a bunch of very ordinary men and women, such as a tax collector named Matthew, and two fishermen, Simon Peter and John.

As Paul wrote, “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – even the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

After a person comes to the Lord there is a wonderful cleansing that takes place spiritually. The new believer feels bathed in God’s love and joy, and wants to bring that love to others. However, those who do not know their Bible well, often allow their emotions to override their understanding of the Word of God. And this can create a problem in doctrine. The Apostle Paul discussed this in his letter to the Corinthian church, chastising them for allowing immoral individuals to continue to live in sin and remain within the congregation. The church had thought that they were showing kindness and compassion for fellow parishioners. And they believed that such love was the “Christian” thing to do. But Paul told them that it was not. He made it clear that the primary loyalty that Christians ought to have should be to Jesus Christ, not to each other. He told them, “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6 KJV; also, see 1 Corinthians 15:33).

Paul made it clear that the Church of Christ must set such a good example of holiness and righteousness to the world that it brings glory to God. What the Corinthians were doing seemed loving and compassionate to them, but to the world, it looked hypocritical. Paul tried to convey to them that, unlike the devil, God is just, righteous, and law-abiding. Therefore, the church can’t tolerate even the perception that it is a safe harbor for evil, and a protector to those who seek to escape punishment for wrongdoing.

Paul explained to the church that living under the new covenant of grace doesn’t mean we may sin with impunity! He compared sin to yeast, which spreads in bread until the whole loaf is filled with hot air. He was telling them that they were wrong to put their love for fellow believers ahead of their responsibility to keep the church pure and undefiled from this world’s sin. And his analogy of the yeast in bread was a metaphor for sin in the church. He told them to expel the sinful individuals from their congregation before their sin spread and influenced others to do evil as well. For if this continued, it would eventually corrupt the entire body of Christ.

Some prison inmates think that by becoming Christians

they can get an early parole. The thief on the cross expected Jesus to be the means through which he could escape punishment, but he was rebuked by the thief on the other cross: “**Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong”** (Luke 23:40–41).

St. Peter said, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:15–16 KJV). We say anyone who is truly repentant will want to pay back their debt to society, as did Zacchaeus, who said, “Now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8).

It is natural for a convict to become impatient and anxious about getting out of prison. Nevertheless, we encourage such a person to trust God with their life and to patiently allow Him to direct it. We often use the examples of Joseph (Genesis 37:2–36 and 39:1 through 50:26) and Daniel (Daniel 1:1–6, 2:12–49, and 6:1–28) in counseling. They were both righteous young men who loved and served God, but ended up in prison for circumstances beyond their control. Yet when God was ready for them to get out of prison, they were not only delivered from it, but also blessed with power, riches, and influence as a result of their faith. If they are “short-timers,” Teleios, the Department’s pre- and post-release ministry, offers intensive direction.

A distinction must be drawn between those who are suffering for Christ, and those who have committed awful crimes, and are paying their debt to society. We remind inmates that Peter wrote to the church, “It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God” (1 Peter 2:19–20). Therefore, those who try to use Christ as a means of escaping punishment only bring shame on Him and disgrace.

Anyone can serve Jesus when they get all they want, but the true test of a believer comes during the times of discouragement and bitter trials of faith (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:3–9). True Christianity means putting the will of God first, before our own will (Luke 22:42). That’s why we teach prisoners that God does not exist to serve the church. We exist to serve Him!

Consequently, if and when the Lord is ready for an inmate to get out of prison, he or she won’t have to spend a fortune on lawyers or waste all their time writing briefs. The doors of the prison will open for them very easily. But if it is not His will for them ever to get out of prison, or if they are to

face the death penalty for a vicious murder, the best testimony of their faith in Christ is to keep their eyes on Him, and live what remains of their life beyond reproach!

In that way everyone will see the difference that Jesus can make, and that even in what were once the coldest and darkest of hearts, His light can shine through with a joy and peace that the world cannot even understand (Philippians 4:7; John 14:27). As St. Paul, the Apostle stated, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21 NIV).

Paul made it clear in his letters to the church that law enforcement officials are acting as God’s emissaries when they punish those who have acted wickedly (Romans 13:4). This authority is based on the same principle as that of the parent, who becomes God’s emissary over his child. This is true even when the parent or government official is not living for God (see Matthew 24:45–51 and John 19:10–11). The Apostle Peter echoed the same sentiment regardless of whether a prisoner believes he or she is suffering fairly (1 Peter 2:11–23). From the books of Genesis to Revelation, the Bible makes it clear that God expects mankind to promote justice and fairness in all governmental decisions. There is no justice, however, when evil is easily overlooked or excused.

Therefore, we maintain that those who believe that a convict should escape just punishment for the crimes he has committed, as a reward for becoming a Christian, are not standing on firm biblical ground. Many times, those who attempt to thwart justice under the guise of Scripture, are themselves not living for God as they should (Romans 1:32). For while eternal justice lies under the jurisdiction of God (Revelation 20:11–15), a righteous and God-fearing government will not condone, excuse, or soft-pedal evil.

The Department is engaged in the lives of inmates, their families, and “at-risk” children (some who may be children of inmates). Through a ministry within the Department, Teleios Ministries, there is a focus on preparing inmates expecting to be released, and after-care, either by direct care when possible, or networking with ministries or agencies within the local areas in which an inmate may be locating. The Department trains interested volunteers through a manual and direct training in forums in various localities.

Are we overlapping with the ministry of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), the prison ministry under the direction of the Assembly of Bishops? No: As the Archdiocese has various departments, such as Education, Evangelism, Orthodox Campus Fellowship, we can nurture our respective entities by our cooperation. As the Director of the Department, I believe that we can offer each other extensive resources, training, support and encouragement.

Fr. David Randolph
Director of the Department of Prison Ministry

ECUMENISM: THE AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE IN “THE BODY OF CHRIST”

Fr. John Oliver

There we were, huddled with wonder in Jerusalem’s Upper Room among 120 disciples and the Son of God’s own mother. The air in the room was charged; we were still dazzled by the Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into heaven of our Master, our Teacher, our Savior. He told us to wait for “the promise of My Father” (Luke 24:49). We didn’t know precisely what He meant until shaken with the power of that mighty rushing wind of Pentecost – the descent of the Holy Spirit. This was not some created gift from a remote God, no adrenaline bath or emotional state, but the actual and deifying presence of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit comes with His own gift: an incomparably greater *embodiment* of the Church as cohesive Christian community, as unprecedentedly material immateriality. The Church existed in the pre-Christian era of the Old Testament in the relation between the prophets and God. In the Father-originated, Christ-established, Spirit-inspired “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23), however, the world discovers the Church to be the palpable, purifying path toward not merely a moral, but a personal, perfection. The perfect is the person of the Christ. Now, it’s possible! His life for mine, mine for His – His glory for my ashes; His anointing of gladness for my mourning; His apparel of glory for my spirit of indifference (Isaiah 61:3). The Church is not merely how and where we imitate Christ, but the way and the place in which we participate in Him who is “the way.” *He* is “the truth and the life” (John 14:6). As uncreated reality with created expression, the Church – whole, unified, and integrated, as the Christ who organically identifies with her as Head identifies with Body (Colossians 1:18) – pulsates with transfiguring grace.

Christ assured us that He would build His Church upon the Apostle’s confession of Jesus as the Christ



(Matthew 16:13–19). St. Paul proclaimed the Church to be “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and that through the Church the wisdom of God is made known (Ephesians 3:10). (This is why the Bible comes through the Church and is rightly enthroned within it, and not above it.) He reminds us that the Church has no other head but Christ (Colossians 1:18). The Apostle John notes that the Church is guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 2:7).

The mystery of the Church emerges in sharper relief if we see it as the *community of deification*. *Deification* names that process of growing beyond forgiveness of sin and cleansing of conscience toward the staggering privilege of becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). That participation was exemplified on Mt. Tabor in the radiant transfiguration of Christ. Here, the “spirit and soul and body” (1 Thessalonians 5:23) of His human nature was transfused with light, thereby revealing the purpose of our being human, and the goal of our existence. The Church, then, is a dynamic organism of the *only* fixed and peculiar transfiguring grace, a still place of ceaseless motion toward the singular goal of deathless life in Christ. Not a calendar item for Sundays, not a social organization, nor a shop for moral tune-ups, the Church is sweet and shattering confrontation with God.

It is divinity expressed through physicality, which is why, when describing the Church, the Apostle Paul can join the corporeality of “pillar and foundation” to the incorporeality of “the truth.”

What matters in Buddhism is not the Buddha, but his teachings. In the philosophical system of Platonism, it is not its namesake, Plato, who is important, but his teachings. In Taoism, the teachings of Lao Tzu eclipse the man. Christianity’s entire structure, however, rests upon the Person of Jesus Christ, and derives its very life from Him. The Man is the message and the message is the Man. He is no less than its cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20)

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– who is “recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”¹ The Temple raised upon Him cannot but bear a fully harmonized, interpenetrative unity of realities uncreated and created, divine and earthly. This unity is its healing gift to the world: Pentecost becomes *personal*.

ECUMENICAL AND ECUMENISM

Christians of all kinds share a common vocabulary, but often not a common dictionary. *God, faith, salvation, hell, tradition, grace, theology, heart, symbol, Christ* – these are among the terms begging for clarification in our peripatetic age of growing linguistic confusion. To these, add *Church*. What is it? Where is it? What is it for? In the popular religious marketplace, answers are as numerous as listings for “houses of worship” in a Google search.

Consider *ecumenical* and *ecumenism*. Both come from the same Greek root, but diverge toward different meanings, different categories of thought, and toward different visions: one dignified while the other dangerous; one basic to the calling of the Christian, while the other toxic to that calling; one reflecting the life as the Body of Christ, while the other ravaging the Body of Christ without which there is no life.

We may think of *ecumenical* as meaning basically “of the whole habitation of the Church”: it is about the business of this community of deification and its fundamental unity, its energizing pulse in Christ, its vivifying preservation in the Holy Spirit. Among its tasks, it is to affirm, evidentially, through good faith and right

practice, its trustworthiness as that “pillar and foundation of the truth.” By participating in the Church one is being ecumenical. One is being ecumenical, too, by bumping elbows with anyone else – wherever he resides in the numberless religious and non-religious neighborhoods outside the visible boundaries of the Church – to feed the hungry, nurse the sick, clothe the bereft, serve the poor, visit the imprisoned, which are part of the basic mission of the Church. *St. Thomas* in Nashville, *Baptist* in Knoxville, *Methodist* in Memphis, *St. John’s and Mary* in Chattanooga – all these Christian hospitals in Tennessee from theologically-conflicting confessions are yet joined ecumenically in the singular task of caring for the sick. Such ministry, yes. Conjoined in charity, please. Dialogue and dinner with our various neighbors, certainly. Raising a mug of beer or cup of tea to cheerfully toast a mutual agreement not to condemn or kill each other or bust up each other’s property, absolutely.

Beyond that, though? *Ecumenism* is different. The *-ism* should grab our attention immediately, for an *-ism* is often an ideology – a rigid vision or prescription for the way something should be, one that quarters no other mission than to perpetuate the vision. (Think of the difference between *vegetarian* – “I don’t eat meat” – and *vegetarianism* – “no one should eat meat,” or between *science* – “what can be proven by observation” – and *scientism* – “nothing is real if it cannot be proven by observation.”)

Those who espouse *ecumenism* as an ideology hold that all individuals and groups that self-identify as “Christian,” or even simply “spiritual,” together make up the invisible “Body of Christ” or “the Church.” From this comes the popular *Branch Theory* – the presumption that though the Body of Christ may have fallen into divisions that may be out of communion with one another, and may even be incapable of conversation and cordiality with each other, each is yet a branch that diverges from the one big Tree of Jesus Christ.

To be *ecumenical* stands as the high calling of all who follow Christ; *ecumenism* may be the most dangerous of all heresies. Why?

FIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

Imagine a large round table. You sit with eleven other individuals, so that together you make twelve – a number that recalls the apostolic college, those who lived and died for the fullness of the Truth.

You represent an Orthodoxy that professes the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: “We believe in

one God, the Father...in one Lord, Jesus Christ...in the Holy Spirit...in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.”

To your right sits an individual representing a group professing a credal statement close to this, but also that God brings some souls into existence for the purpose of sending them to hell.

To his right is one representing a group teaching that God doesn’t send anyone to hell, but also that Jesus is only one way, “and not always the best way,” among many ways to heaven.

To her right is one professing that Jesus is the only way to heaven, but also that He really isn’t “God,” but only “God’s son.”

To his right is one professing that Christ shares one essence with His Father, but also that sacraments are misguided inventions of sick men inspired by demons.

To her right is one who believes that sacraments are biblical, but also that all authority over all Christians on earth is concentrated in one representative of Christ.

To his right is one who teaches that God speaks not to Christians only, but to all “spiritual” people, also that marriage and sexuality are fluid according to how one identifies oneself, and that Jesus cheerfully blesses and presides over all their “LGBTQ+” expressions.

To her right is one who teaches that marriage and sexuality are defined not by culture, but by “the Church,” but also that anyone not a member of his group is damned.

To his right is one proclaiming that salvation is open to all, but also that the Bible is an outdated relic of the past that needs filtering through modern science and common sense.

To her right is one arguing the Bible is the Good Book for today, but also that, because of “religionless spirituality,” candy and soda pop are just as valid for “the Lord’s Supper” as bread and wine.

To his right is one who teaches that Holy Communion is important, but also that physical sickness and lack of wealth are proofs of insufficient faith and God’s disfavor.

Finally, the individual to her right and to your left, closing the circle of twelve, professes a belief in the Trinity, in some sacraments, in the Bible, in apostolic succession, in traditional views on marriage and sexuality, in helping the poor, but also loudly tells the other ten that your Orthodox group is man-made tradition poisoned with anti-biblical, works-based, soul-destroying ritualism.

Here all of you sit, like *The Fights of the Round Table* – wildly-conflicting beliefs, conflicting teachings, con-

flicting lifestyles, and not only conflicting interpretations of the Bible, but conflicting opinions about whether the Bible even matters.² Now, move back and look up: over the center of the table – visible to vast crowds of starving souls, contemporary and ancient, desperate for *some* guidance through the existential crises in life and death – hangs a wide sign that reads, *The Church*.

Functionally, *that* is ecumenism. Why may ecumenism be the most dangerous of all heresies? Because in an “interfaith” effort, it welcomes *all* heresies under one big tent – any proposition or lie one wants to believe about God or history or the human being. It welcomes both the Arianism of those who deny that Christ is of one essence with the Father, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It accepts the Sabellianism of those who deny that Christ is of one nature with humanity and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can tolerate both the Nestorianism of those who reject the union of natures in Christ and the concomitant veneration of His God-bearing mother, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can harbor both the Macedonianism of those who reject the divinity and divinizing energies of the Holy Spirit, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can include both the Montanism of those who favor the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of the other two Persons, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It sees no problem with the antinomianism of those who deny any moral component to salvation, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It receives both the Iconoclasm of those who reject a material dimension organic to faith, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can bridge, it thinks, the Gnosticism of those who reject a sacramental expression organic to the Incarnation, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t.

Then, all those sitting at the table rise and, as a capstone toast to this carnival of chaos, participate in *the*

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Eucharist? How can we have a common Cup, when we don’t have a common Christ? How can we reconcile eucharistic subjectivism – “we respectfully leave it up to whatever it means to you” – with the scandalous claims of Christ to His own exclusivity (John 14:6). How is it compatible with the holy terror that St. Paul says is appropriate to the bread, because of *Body*, and the wine,

because of *Blood?* (1 Corinthians 11:27–29).

How can “the Church” breed the very spiritual diseases it was established to cure, like a hospital that gives chemotherapy with one needle and cancer with another? How can one dignify with the title of “the Church” a seething collection that – because of its antithetical theologies and doctrines and practices and visions, unlike yesterday’s consort of prophets and apostles and martyrs and fathers with their hesychastic experience of the Word of God – *could neither produce* the New Testament that we have today *nor liturgize* for helpless mankind the saving events of Christ’s life?

Ecumenism rips and refashions, tearing the Church from moorings – historical, theological, christological, soteriological – that give it precision and contour and embodiment in our world, preaching a Christless Church and a Churchless Christ, and redefining “the Body of Christ” as a table of occasionally-agreeing, often-contradicting constituents, as if Jesus Himself could come down sickly with an autoimmune disease – parts of Himself in conflict with and eating away at other parts of Himself. Christ refers to a conflicted kingdom – “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25) – but emphatically not His own.

“DIVIDED, YET NOT DISUNITED”

Fascinatingly, the Orthodox Christian Divine Liturgy refers to a “divided” Christ. As the celebrant parts the consecrated Lamb, he says, “Divided yet not disunited is the Lamb of God, ever eaten, yet never consumed.” In this act – dividing, not disuniting – the whole embodied Son and Word of God rests not fractured nor splintered but *distinguished* on the diskos, so that the particle placed in the mouth of the infant contains all the fullness, all the divinity, all the abundant life as the piece placed in the mouth of the adult. Each fullness *agrees* with every other fullness. On this principle, too, rests Orthodox ecclesiology: the small struggling parish contains all the fullness, all the divinity, all the abundant life of the Son and Word of God as does the large, thriving cathedral. Each part contains the wholeness and the wholeness is present in each part. The expressions of the Church are distinct but

not disunited: *one*, not disintegrated or contradictory; *holy*, not psychological or man-made; *catholic*, not partial or fragmented; *apostolic*, not changing or innovative.

As the living continuity of the faith and life established by Jesus Christ, given to His apostles, described in the Bible, practiced by early believers, defended with the blood of martyrs, and passed on by those Christians associated with the ancient centers and earliest centuries of Christian history, the Church – always in her inner life if not always her outer expression – is *the* place of harmonized wellness.

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Early Latin-speaking Christians described this as *totus christus, caput et corpus* – the whole Christ, Head and Body. Preach *Christ alone* and He dissolves into abstraction – a flexible figure co-opted by various ideologies through the centuries, a champion claimed by wildly contrasting causes, a malleable mystic who floats above the ground and grounding of history. Preach Christ alone and He is vulnerable to the same misinterpretations that distort Holy Scripture when one preaches a churchless Bible. Preach *Church alone* and it degenerates into a social club or a

mechanism for the preservation of culture or a mob of shared superstitions. Preach Church alone and it warps into a “synagogue of Satan,” a system of power and of power abused.

Preach the “total Christ – Head and Body,” however, and we enter embodied healing, fullness and right order and the salvific stability of something that unstable man did not invent. Here are found the virtues of Christ-like humility and Christ-centered truth, filling every part within the whole. To preach the “total Christ – Head and Body” is to discover both who saves us and how we are saved; who died for us and how to carry our cross; who reconciled us to the Father and how we appropriate that reconciliation for ourselves; whose immortality we need and how to exchange our mortality for it. Anything short of the *Churchful Christ* and the *Christful Church* poisons an already parched world, like giving shipwrecked souls nothing but seawater to quench their excruciating thirst.

PROFESSING, NOT PRESUMING

This is crucial: with equal conviction we profess both the knowability of one true Church *and* the unknow-

ability of who is safely part of it. Simple observation from history and headlines reveals that the Church stands in radiant glory, while we ragged attendants sullying its reputation remain “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

With the discerning Paul, we do not presume to judge the essential condition of anyone, including ourselves: “In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Corinthians 4:3–5). A clear conscience is a coveted thing, but it does not itself determine innocence. The field of faith cradles both wheat and tares together (Matthew 13:24–30), the dragnet gathers both the good and the bad (Matthew 13:47–50), and separating one from the other will be the sole and solemn assignment of none but the angels.

Suspension of all judgment should especially frighten the Orthodox, for whom the most buoyant words in the Divine Liturgy – “We have seen the true Light; we have found the true Faith” – are also the most brutal. They are buoyant, because this really is the Ark in the storm of “the world, the flesh, and the devil” (Ephesians 2:2–3); brutal, because the Ark’s Founder and Head mandates, “for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him will be asked the more” (Luke 12:48). Poor is the soul who settles into a local Orthodox parish in search of nothing more than the feeling of a *psychological guarantee* of salvation.

None should work out their salvation with greater “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) than those who presume they’re snuggled comfortably in the Ark: “Woe to you, Orthodox! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Geneva or Grand Rapids, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Rome and Canterbury in the day of judgment than for you.” Why did Jesus tell the religious Pharisees that repentant “prostitutes and tax collectors are entering heaven before you”? (Matthew 21:31). It is because you who have much, have produced little, while they who have little, have produced much.

HOLY DESIRE

Heresies are to Christ’s Church what holes are to Noah’s Ark – ruptures in integrity that may appear small and

inconsequential, but in fact let in powerful forces of great destruction and malevolence. Deceptive is any consideration of the “size” of heresy, since heresy often hides in “personal opinion” contrary to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Yet we must talk and reason and debate and grow, and profess only to retract and profess again. We must *live*. Yet when personal opinion rises from a launch-pad of ego – and creates a blog or writes a book or records a podcast or ignores a history or starts a church or counsels a fragile soul – that offering can become a dish of confusion or a portal of the demonic. It is heresy’s halting effect on spiritual healing that’s inadmissible, and its capacity to open the way for more heresy. Christ’s warning to His disciples is that they beware not of the *loaf*, but of the *leaven* of bad teaching (Matthew 16:12) – roughly the size of a quarter-coin in the whole bread. The Orthodox, then, conclude Divine Liturgy with an appeal to God to “preserve the fullness of the Church” as Noah might appeal to God to “preserve the integrity of the Ark.” If the Church allows holes or heresies, it becomes not the community of deification, but a commonwealth of the damned.

For all who shall be saved, salvation comes through the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, for “neither is there salvation in any other, no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved” (Acts 4:12): either through baptism by *water* – as ascetic participants in the Mysteries of the Church; baptism by *blood* – as martyrs or confessors for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; or baptism by *desire* – as good souls who would join her if they knew of her accessible existence.

For any cultural ridicule or rejection of Christianity, followers of Jesus need blame none but ourselves, really. Good intentions granted, we’re such a scattered bunch – in global expression and personal example – so that “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of [us]” (Romans 2:24). Hiding in this disarray, however, is at least this glorious hope: many who appear lost today for a defiantly antagonistic posture toward Christianity will be saved at the Judgment Seat because, in fact and perhaps unknowingly, they had rejected not Christ but all false Christs, not His Body but all deformed and disappointing presentations of it. For all who’ve endured shaming or shunning or sacrifice because they wouldn’t settle for counterfeits, how merciful is He to reward them with the real thing in His real Kingdom!

1. The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451.
2. See Craig D. Atwood, editor, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 13th edition (Abingdon Press, October 2010).



Grace through Anointing

Michael Pagani

My life, by any standard, has been very fruitful and blessed. Ten years ago, I was moved by God to marry and start a family. With full faith that this was possible, I found my wife, (actually, she found me) and we had two beautiful children, a girl and a boy. I have been part of the Christian Church since birth, but became an Orthodox Christian only seven years ago. Since that time, I have received the holy sacraments of Chrismation, Marriage, Confession, and the Eucharist. The sacrament of Marriage was the happiest moment in my life; chrismation was the most awe-inspiring; and communion always brings fulfillment. The receiving of holy oil, however, was an experience of grace that was given during a very sacred, silent and sad time in my life.

Two years ago my family and I moved very far from our home in Florida to start a new life in Seattle, with a new job and two young children. Not long after the move I began to feel weak and tired. I attributed this sudden feeling of lethargy to the late-night calls of a baby and living in a strange new climate. The doctors I visited had no answers except for me to get more exercise. Only after six months of pain and breaking an arm for no reason did someone come up with the diagnosis: I had a rare bone cancer. As any sentence with the word “rare” in it, the prognosis and treatment prospects did not look good. After much poking, prodding and testing, they told us that it was a very rare type of cancer called *multiple myeloma*. They also confirmed that the testing up to that point indicated that my cancer was very aggressive and in an advanced state. Statistically, unless the last battery of tests showed something different, they gave me a little more than 15 months to live. The last tests did come back and it was not *the worst* possible state, but they were still not encouraged about the likely outcome. The time had come for me to prepare for my physical and spiritual pas-

sage, even though I had many great blessings in my life and had a bright future with my wonderful wife, children, and church.

Bone cancer is extremely painful and can incapacitate you very quickly. With two beautiful children and a wonderful wife, however, I continued to move through the pain and to live, pray, and participate in life in every possible moment, because I had so few moments left. I am and always will feel grateful for having a blessed life and prayed unceasingly to God for “grace not for me, a sinner, but for them, thy children, your gift to me.” I had no fear of death, but rather great sadness in leaving my very young family so soon. The simple task of holding my child in my arms or lying down with my wife was soon out of my reach, but love was not absent from our lives during that dark time, for we had our faith at home and our church close to us. Praise be to God that we did have a church, because it was at church that God answered my unspoken prayer.

I am a recent convert to Orthodox Christianity who is still amazed at the authentic and unchanged practices that make for a powerful experience during worship. I am also strengthened in my faith by those who are able to receive the gifts of grace in the church. I know through prayer and supplication that they are moving towards *theosis*. I understand for many of us, that the sacraments and acts of grace often “feel” theoretical. The more time I spent in church, the more I felt this sense of mystery following me everywhere. At some moments, I have to admit, the pain was so distracting during my activities that the awareness of grace was lost. While being in severe pain, I understood that God was giving His grace, but I did not perceive its blessing. Only at the end of the day, after everything was said and done, could I have a sense of grace and gratitude in moments of silence.

Of course, not all experiences through my new church

have been earth-moving moments, but what happened after months of pain and loss was profound and subtle at the same time. The pain rose to such a level that I could understand how death could be a welcomed gift. My primary emotion was sadness that I would not be able to raise my children as God had moved my heart. My wife’s primary emotion was undirected anger, yet she became more steadfast in her faith and more faithful to me. I did feel as if we were being tested like Job, but we did not know why. I found the only source of comfort to my mind and soul was constant prayer and long periods of silence. My wife and I made the necessary arrangements with wills, trust and guardianship with many tears, but never any regrets. They finally decided on and started a treatment protocol at the beginning of April 2017. I continued to pray without expectations beyond what the doctors told us.

It was then, after only two weeks of treatment, at a Wednesday service of Vespers and confession, that I received holy oil from Saint Sava Monastery in the Holy Land, in the silent sanctuary of our family church. The act of blessing performed by my priest was not theoretical but rather very visceral. Even more important was the subsequent act of grace.

I told him that I needed to tell him something before my confession began. Up until then, thinking of death and my family’s future had a theoretical feel to it; however, once I began to speak about it to our priest, everything became real. The gentle demeanor of our priest allowed me to open up about everything. I said that dying was not the issue for me, for I felt close to Christ; rather, my prayers were for my children. The idea that they would be raised without a father was heartbreaking for me. My only prayer was that I could remain as long as possible for their sake.

After confession my priest and confessor asked if I was open to receiving a blessing of holy oil from the Saint Sava Monastery in the Holy Land. I said “Yes.” I spent a few moments in prayer and waited for Father to return from behind the iconostasis. As I walked forward I could see and feel the space around the iconostasis become light. My heart was lighter, I felt comforted even through the pain of my broken arm. I could feel a sigh of relief rising and falling from my body. It was the same lightness I felt during my chrismation a few years before, but at that time, my life was filled with the happiness of a pending marriage and a new faith! This was a much different time, shrouded with the texture of death and departure. In that moment, however, the same luminescence was upon us. As Father performed the blessing and anointing

with holy oil, it was a moment of stillness, and a sense of grace descended upon me. I was not aware of any words spoken, only that the sign of the cross was made. The oil that touched my skin had a weight of intent and a fragrance that transported me out of the mundane. I dared not speak because of the flood of emotional gratitude for a simple act of kindness.

As I walked away from the steps of the iconostasis, it was as if a cloud of witnesses from within the icons moved with me. In my heart I felt tenderness bestowed by the eyes of angels and the Theotokos watching in full awareness of the grace given to this servant. I was also aware that this moment of mercy was not just about me, but my family, and the church of which I had become a part, in the last days of my life.

Less than a week later I was tested to see if the medical treatments had any positive effect on the progression of the cancer. The tests could not find any trace of cancer in my blood. This was not expected by any of our physicians, but it was great news to hear at the start of the treatment protocol! We held our collective breath and finished the first series of treatments. We then waited for subsequent bone biopsies and molecular testing to confirm what each blood test showed: there was no trace of cancer in my body. Long before one complete treatment series was fully administered, the testing confirmed that I was in full remission. The top experts in the field of multiple myeloma agreed that there was only one thing that we did that was different from all other patients: the stated use of prayer and holy oil.

The results of the testing were remarkable, but what was most miraculous was the change in pain. During the long winter of physical dissolution, I had lost my left ninth rib, right twelfth rib, and my right upper arm. Within six weeks they showed remarkable signs of returning, and surgery was not needed. I went from only sleeping upright in a chair, to lying down in a bed, finally. I was most grateful for the ability to hold my children in my arms and carry them while they slumbered or in fun. I found myself able to sleep through the night, which had not been possible for at least two years.

The indisputable fact that there was an unexpected healing of my body, confirmed by physicians, has led our family to give thanks and praise to God, and to offer our lives to the service of the Church. It is fair to say that the healing was a combination of spirit and science, but the praise and glory is given to God. It can be said that God’s grace of healing was able to work through our local priest, working mysteriously within me, as the Fathers of the Church had intended.

Michael Pagani became an Orthodox Christian in 2011. He was also married the same year at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Pinellas Park, Florida, by Fr. Michael Massouh. Michael is an acupuncture physician and has had a practice of alternative medicine for the past 30 years. He now is a member of St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church in Brier, Washington.



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WHEN I TOOK A PHILOSOPHY CLASS IN COLLEGE, THE TEACHER STARTED THINGS OFF BY MAKING A PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT: GOD IS LOVE; LOVE IS BLIND; RAY CHARLES IS BLIND; THEREFORE, RAY CHARLES IS GOD. THIS WAS AMUSING, WHICH WAS THE PROFESSOR’S INTENT. UPON REFLECTION, I THINK THAT WHAT MOST IMPRESSED ME WAS THE UNIVERSAL PREMISE: THAT “GOD IS LOVE.” IN OUR SOCIETY, MOST PEOPLE ACCEPT THIS PREMISE AS SIMPLE FACT, OR AT LEAST THEY UNDERSTAND IT TO BE THE FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF CHRISTIANITY. WE ARE TAUGHT SONGS LIKE “JESUS LOVES ME” AS CHILDREN, AND WE SEE BILLBOARDS AND SIGNS AT SPORTING EVENTS QUOTING JOHN 3:16: “FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

When tragedy strikes – whether large-scale, or something like the death of a family member – I am often asked the question “Why?” I struggled with this same question when my own mother died. My mother – a woman who devoted her life to God and His Church, was married to a priest for nearly 30 years, and worked for a hospice agency helping terminal patients and their families deal with death – was diagnosed and treated for thyroid cancer in 2004, and battled ovarian cancer from 2005 until her death in May of 2008. I wanted an answer to the question, “Why?” Some days, I still would like one. Trying to reconcile all this with the claim that “God is Love” is not easy. Why did God let this happen? We will look at what the Church and the Holy Fathers teach about suffering, and then turn our attention to ways we might teach these things in large group retreats or discussions, and in one-on-one conversations intended to help people struggling with their own pain, or with the suffering or loss of a loved one.

“Not As Those Who Have No Hope”

Many saints of the Church are described as “long-suffering” in the way they met their deaths. In their actions, dealing with tribulation, they imitated the suffering of Christ, who is regularly described during the services of Holy Week – specifically in relation to the Passion – as the “Long-suffering Lord.” In his preaching on Psalm 53 (54), St. Basil the Great says the following about long-suffering:

“Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy power. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear unto the words of my mouth.” For although twelve legions of angels might have come to the help of the Lord in His hour of passion, yet that He might perfectly fulfill His service of humble obedience, He surrendered Himself to suffering and weakness, only praying with the words: Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit. After the same pattern, David, whose actual sufferings prophetically foretold the future sufferings of the Lord, opposed not his enemies either by word or act; in obedience to the command of the Gospel, he would not render evil for evil, in imitation of his Master’s meekness, in his affliction, in his betrayal, in his fight, he called upon the Lord and was content to use His weapons only in his contest with the ungodly.¹

Surrendering completely to the will of God and embracing our suffering, for St. Basil, is the way we deal with suffering. When we turn to the lives of the saints, we see countless examples of long-suffering through tribulations, staying true in their following of Christ. This may seem to be easy enough, and we may even wonder what we would do in situations like these, but dealing with the reality is not as easy as reading about it. Still, suffering does seem to be something that helps us attain the ultimate goal: salvation.

In his first and second discourses *On the Origin of Humanity*, St. Basil further explores the theme of suffering in the way we experience loss, with an implicit understanding that God did not intend His creation to undergo this. As St. Basil

explains *image* and *likeness*, it is “by our creation we have the first [image], and by our free choice we build the second [likeness].”² Loss, then, becomes a part of the process of building up the likeness of God within us. If, through our experiencing loss, we are reminded of the *expulsion* from paradise, then one could argue that we begin our *return* through the process of grieving or bereavement. As we begin to re-learn our world following loss, we are faced with a choice: What role will God play in the world we will come to know? The Old Testament is replete with examples of the people of God struggling to answer this question. We have examples in the Tower of Babel, and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which people reject the God who, shortly before, saved them from despair. Our ability to live in sorrowful joy comes from knowing God through our sorrow, and our trust that we, as St. Basil taught, “were born that [we] might see God ... that [we] might achieve heavenly citizenship.”³

That is not at all to say that we are to seek out suffering. St. Athanasius in his great work, *The Life of Antony*, explains how St. Antony the Great would deal with suffering:

This was the advice he [St. Antony] gave to those who came to him. And with those who suffered he sympathized and prayed.... But always he gave the Lord thanks and besought the sufferer to be patient, and to know that healing belonged neither to him nor to man at all, but only to the Lord, who doeth good when and to whom He will. The sufferers therefore used to receive the words of the old man as though they were a cure, learning not to be downhearted but rather to be long-suffering. And those who were healed were taught not to give thanks to Antony but to God alone.⁴

These Fathers show us, first, that we learn to be long-suffering only through suffering. Long-suffering is a virtue that we develop in order to continue on the path towards eternal life. Similarly, the virtue of patience must be learned. As human beings, we are not predisposed to patience and long-suffering – as we can easily see in our current American culture – and therefore those virtues need to be learned behaviors. Furthermore, when our suffering is alleviated, we must give glory and thanksgiving to God, for it is by Him alone that we are delivered.

In his *Homily on First Corinthians*, St. John Chrysostom takes a different approach. Although St. John and St. Paul appear to be talking about a different form of suffering, their basic message is still appropriate for our purposes. St. John considers St. Paul’s words: “And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”⁵

He comments:

Together with our perils from without, we also strain ourselves to the utmost with perpetual labor. And what is still more, no one can say that we fret at these things, for the contrary [of fretting] is our requital [i.e., our compensation] to them that so deal with us: this, I say, is the main point, not our suffering evil, for that is common to all, but our suffering [is] without despondency or vexation For whoso suffers wrong and avenges not himself nor is vexed, is reckoned a fool by the heathen; and dishonored and weak ... so also when he [Christ] desires to attract them to himself hurrying by all his miracles, he speaks of his sufferings on their account. So also it is our method when we be injured by any and despised, whatsoever we have endured for them, to bring the same forward For that effect one produces not so well by reproach as by silence.⁶

So, when we suffer, we are not to seek out revenge and be troubled. Christ spoke of His suffering for our sake, so we also are to suffer in a way that mimics Him. This is counter-cultural – even by the time of St. Paul – but it is the high calling of Christians.

Patristic thought on suffering is brought together and summarized by St. John of Damascus.⁷ In his discussion, St. John looks to the biblical figures known for their suffering, specifically Job, Paul, Lazarus (and the rich man), the man born blind, the martyrs, and, of course, Christ.

For Providence often permits the just man to encounter misfortune in order that he may reveal to others the virtue that lies concealed within him, as was the case with Job. At other times it allows something strange to be done in order that something great and marvelous might be accomplished through the seemingly strange act, as when the salvation of men was brought about through the Cross. In another way it allows the pious man to suffer sore trials in order that he may not depart from a right conscience nor lapse into pride on account of the power and grace granted to him, as was the case with Paul. One man is forsaken for a season with a view to another’s restoration, in order that others when they see his state may be taught a lesson, as in the case of Lazarus and the rich man. For it belongs to our nature to be cast down when we see persons in distress. Another is deserted by Providence in order that another may be glorified, and not for his own sin or that of his parents, just as the man who was blind from his birth ministered to the glory of the Son of Man. Again another is permitted to suffer in order to stir up emulation in the breasts of others, so that others by magnifying the glory

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1. St. Basil the Great, *Homily on Psalm 53 (54)* 1:3-4 in *The Early Church Fathers*.
2. St. Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, 43.
3. *Ibid.*, 61.
4. St. Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 56:1-6, in *The Early Church Fathers*.
5. 1 Corinthians 4:12-13.
6. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 23: 1 Cor. iv.10.2 in *The Early Church Fathers*.
7. St. John is considered the father of systematic theology mainly because in his writings he synthesized the patristic thought before him.
8. St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 2:29.

9. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.
10. When I actually had this discussion, my respondent took a moment, then said, “Wow ... that actually makes a lot of sense.”
11. 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

of the sufferer may resolutely welcome suffering in the hope of future glory and the desire for future blessings, as in the case of the martyrs. Another is allowed to fall at times into some act of baseness in order that another worse fault may be thus corrected, as for instance when God allows a man who takes pride in his virtue and righteousness to fall away into fornication in order that he may be brought through this fall into the perception of his own weakness and be humbled and approach and make confession to the Lord.⁸

St. John appears to be saying that God allows suffering so that it might benefit the sufferer and those who witness their suffering, something that is not easily understood by most people – myself included. That being said, this seems to be a concise and complete patristic view of suffering, something that we all must seek to understand. This is probably easier for those who have studied theology, but how do we, as pastors, relate this understanding to people who have not studied theology? This connection with life is where things get sticky. How might we begin to teach this?

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis quotes Scottish poet, author and minister George MacDonald. “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.”⁹ Following my mother’s passing, this notion was extremely difficult to bear or understand. She submitted her notions of control to God. In the end, she died peacefully, painlessly, and at home. Through her suffering, she was able to discover what it means to be truly in control, to give herself over to God. She taught us how to die. Teaching this is no easy task.

In preparing teaching material for a retreat on this topic, I would begin an introductory session with a discussion of the question: “What is healing?” This discussion would be guided to include the tension inherent between modern medicine’s focus on healing of the body, and the Orthodox understanding of the unification of soul and body. The distinction between the healing of the body alone, as opposed to the healing of the mind or soul is seen most pointedly in the encounter between Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate, following the Crucifixion. In the account in Mark’s Gospel, after Christ gives up His Spirit, Joseph asks Pilate for the *body* (σῶμα) of Jesus. After determining that Christ was dead, Pilate gives him the body (πτῶμα, or *corpse*). This suggests that, as beings created in the image and likeness of God, our bodies are not the focus. Therefore, to answer the initial question, *true healing comes in our death*. It is then, through the passing from life in this world to life with Christ, that we are truly healed. This is precisely the joy that is brought into the world through the Cross, as we hear in the hymn following the Gospel of

Orthros. When discussing this topic, one-on-one or with the family in our parish who asked, “Why did she survive, only to die?” we would also begin with this distinction.

In the second retreat session, we would examine further the idea that, though society avoids death at every turn, the Church does not. The difference between modern medicine’s notions of healing, as opposed to the Church’s understanding of healing, helps us deal with tragedy. This session would include breakout work. The entire group would be divided into small groups, and each would be given one of the quotations from patristic literature above. This would be discussed in the small group setting and presented to the group at large. Returning to the example of the family within the parish, the dialogue would center around the simple (though difficult) statement: “Your grandmother survived so she could prepare for her death.”¹⁰ In both situations, when we present these topics as they are, not as the world expects them to be, we begin to approach death in a way that allows us to deal with it. Then, when we are faced with our own death or the loss of a loved one, we have a foundational understanding of mortality.

I would close a retreat on this topic with the opening of the Epistle reading for an Orthodox Funeral Service: “We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may sorrow not as others who have no hope.”¹¹ This apostolic desire to ensure that people are not ignorant points to the very need for these discussions. The serious and somber nature of the topic warrants a level of openness and frankness. Though we are conditioned to think that any discussion about death is taboo, we do ourselves and others a disservice when we hide from this topic. I have been very fortunate to hear Fr. John Behr speak on this topic a number of times. Though it can be unsettling, it is also freeing when he begins his lecture with the words, “Everyone in this room is going to die.” This would be unsettling, because we avoid death. When we hear this statement, however, with an understanding that our death is our ultimate moment of healing, we can begin to live our life in a way that prepares for that moment. We are in a constant process of change, changing so that we might be recreated in the image of God, an image lost by our actions. When a pot is being formed, the clay is beaten and mashed and smoothed and shaped into a pot, before it can be put into the kiln. We are constantly being mashed so that we might then be smoothed. Through the examples of those who we have seen suffering, we learn what it means to trust in God, giving ourselves over to Him. Our God encompasses the entire world and all time; his knowledge is beyond our imagination. In understanding this, we move from ignorance towards knowledge of God.



THE HOPE OF THE HOPELESS

Khouria Tammy Makoul

During turbulent times in our society and in the world at large, our Holy Orthodox Church never ceases to give us the hope that we need in this life. Through miraculous wonders, Christ Himself shows us that our faith is alive and active, that our good and gracious God loves us, and that He continues to pour on us His mercy through the saints and the most blessed Theotokos. As many of the faithful everywhere have found in venerating myrrh-streaming icons, so I have seen the “Hawaiian” Myrrh-Streaming Iveron Mother make an indelible imprint on my life. Imagine being in a beautiful field of thousands of fragrant roses.... The scent permeates your being and you don’t want to leave such a paradise. You close your eyes and hold on to this experience forever. You wonder, have I been transported to another world? In this experience, I ponder our Holy Virgin.

The Mother of God calls us to Her as she called the Christ child. As we pour out our innermost thoughts and feelings in Her presence, She hears us and dives into the depths of our hearts. Our Mother saves us through Christ, who loves us and gave His life for us. *All* of creation rejoices and bows to Her, who is more spacious than the heavens. She tugs at our hearts and pierces them with love as She brings us closer to Christ, who is Life and Light.

What can we say about our most beautiful Mother? She gives us hope when we feel despair. She heals us when we are sick. She brings us protection when we call upon Her. “She is the ready help to those who flee to her, and a refuge of all Christians. She has joined the fallen nature of our race to heavenly things” (from Little Compline and the Akathist Hymn). She gives us joy and peace, and a calm that surpasses all time and space. In Her, we find solace.

The “Hawaiian” Iveron Mother weeps myrrh consis-



tently and is a consolation in a dreary world. *In knowing our Mother, we know hope*. In knowing Her, we know Christ Himself, who dwelt in Her and is God before all ages. In knowing Her, we begin to taste Heaven on Earth; and in knowing her, we learn true humility. As we reflect on the Nativity of Christ, who was born of a Virgin, let us ponder the sweet kisses She gave to the Christ Child, and the love that She also gives to us.

“Since June of 2008, the ‘Hawaiian’ Myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon has been to over a

thousand churches of all jurisdictions in North America, and has been venerated by millions of people throughout the world. As of November 2016, this icon has been officially recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church as miraculous and worthy of veneration, and was given the blessing to travel to the various churches and monasteries of Holy Orthodoxy” (www.orthodoxhawaii.org).

For more information or to help build a shrine for a more permanent home for the icon, you may contact its guardian, Sub-deacon Nectarios, at O.H.I.I.A. (P.O. Box 251 Aiea, Hawaii 96701). When the Hawaiian Iveron Mother’s icon is not traveling, we may extol and chant hymns of praise to Her, who is the cause of our rejoicing!

“From thy holy Icon, O Lady Theotokos, blessed myrrh has flowed abundantly. Thou hast therefore consoled those, in exile, faithful unto thee, and hast enlightened the unbelievers by thy Son’s light. Therefore, O Lady, with tears we bow down to thee. Be merciful to us in the hour of judgment. Lest, having received thy mercy, we be punished as those who have been contemptuous of it. But grant us through thy prayers to bring forth spiritual fruit, and save our souls” –

Troparion to the Iveron Icon, Tone 7

Khouria Tammy Makoul
St. George Cathedral, Pittsburgh

Holy Matrimony?

Fr. Daniel Daly

Fifty years ago, when I was a seminary student, a recently ordained priest returned for a visit. As future priests, we were naturally curious about how his new life as a priest was going. I remember almost nothing about the conversation with the new priest, but one remark that he made not only surprised me at that time, but has remained with me throughout my life as a priest: “The most difficult part of my ministry is the weddings.” I do not remember the details of why he found weddings problematic. Over the past half-century, however, I have come to understand his feelings, and I have found that they are shared by many priests. Why is this so?

Anyone who has gone through the often year-long process leading up to a wedding knows that it can be very stressful. As weddings plans go forward, differences of opinions can arise between family members. Given, too, the many details that make up a successful wedding, one should not be surprised. The church, the hall, the food, the clothes,

the photography, the attendants, the music, whom to invite, and whom not to invite – any and all can be causes of disagreement and resentment. For two families to work together in harmony can be very challenging. Expectations often are unrealistic.

Are these problems new? Not really. Given the importance of a marriage, some measure of stress is unavoidable. One example of wedding problems can be found in the writings of one of the great Fathers of the church, St. John Chrysostom.¹ St. John is most remembered for his preaching. After St. Paul, he is regarded the greatest preacher in the life of the church. He was also a pastor. After his years as a priest in Antioch, he was taken to Constantinople, where he became Archbishop. His life there was very difficult. He was eventually sent into exile, where he died a painful death. St. John was forthright and very direct in what he had to say. His pastoral advice was often unpopular.

In his writings, St. John addresses all aspects of married

life: how to choose a spouse, human intimacy, how to live as a Christian in the married state, and specifically how a husband and wife should treat one another. His writings have more wisdom for wives and husbands than the modern advice columns. Although his remarks on all aspects of married life are of great value, I would like to confine my remarks to the wedding itself. What he says about weddings even after sixteen centuries is still very applicable to our present situation.

St. John’s remarks are most likely directed to the wealthier families of Constantinople. These weddings took place in the family home. What we call the reception took place in the same place. Today a sharp distinction is made between the marriage itself and the reception that follows. In the typical Orthodox parish, this would be what goes on upstairs and what goes on downstairs, or in a rented hall. St. John would reject what is really a false distinction. All is part of the wedding. All is sacramental. The Lord’s presence at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the miracle he performed, were clearly at the reception. He does not stay in the church after the ceremony. The icon of the Wedding Feast at Cana is very revealing regarding the Lord’s presence. He is seated in what obviously is a place of honor. Failing to see the unity between ceremony and reception has serious implications for how people behave in the hours after the ceremony. When people speak of their wedding, they ought not to make distinctions between the ceremony and the reception. The standards of Christian behavior do not change in the hall. This is true for what is said, what is sung, and how we behave.

St. John’s remarks are very critical of the practices of his time. He himself tells us why. “Nowadays on the day of the wedding people dance and sing hymns to Aphrodite, songs full of adultery, corruption of marriage, illicit loves, unseemly drunkenness and shameful speeches.” “When you invoke demons by your songs, when you fulfill their desires by your shameful speeches, when you bring mimes and effeminate actors and the whole theater into your house, when you fill your house with harlots and arrange for a whole chorus of demons to make merry there, what good can you expect, tell me?” (*On Marriage and Family Life*, pp. 82, 83).

Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation. The Romans knew her as Venus. Her fertility cult, widespread in pre-Christian times had not been entirely eliminated. St. John’s words are sufficient to reveal the erotic content of their theatrical presentations. How widespread were these presentations? St. John was certainly not alone in condemning them. The Synod of

Laodicea A.D. 343–381 makes that very clear: “Members of the priesthood and of the clergy must not witness the plays at weddings or banquets; but before the players enter, they much rise and depart” (Canon LIV).² If what happens at the reception embarrasses the clergy, it would certainly embarrass the Lord.

Given the context in which St. John writes, his objections are understandable. “Marriage,” he says, “is a bond, a bond ordained by God. Why then do you celebrate in a silly and immodest manner?” “You can enjoy a banquet with your friends to celebrate your marriage; I do not forbid this.” (p. 74) “Don’t you remember St. Paul’s words: ‘So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.’ Or the Palmist’s when he said, ‘Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in him with trembling.’ But your behavior is dishonorable and blasphemous, totally without restraint. Is it not possible for pleasure and temperance to coexist?” (pp. 77–78).

“Are you fond of music?” he asks (p. 78). Obviously he was troubled by the inappropriate content of the songs: “I would prefer that you love silence best of all, but if you must have songs, choose edifying ones, not satanic ones” (p. 78). In his opposition to music, St. John was not alone. The Apostolic Constitutions, written a few years before he became Archbishop of Constantinople, would not allow the baptism of a flute- or harp-player unless he renounced his trade.³ One musical historian notes, “This vehemence against instrumental musicians is primarily explained by the association of musical instruments with sexual license, luxurious banquets and the immorality of the theatre” (*ibid*). With this understanding we can see why St. John would say, “Don’t hire bands or orchestras; such an expense is excessive and unbecoming” (p. 79).

St. John knows that his remarks will not be welcome. “I am aware that many people think me ridiculous for giving such advice; but if you listen to me, you will understand the advantages of a sober life-style more and more as time goes by. You will no longer laugh at me, but will laugh instead at the way people live now like silly children or drunken men” (p. 60). “I know that some people think I am burdensome and difficult, giving advice like this and uprooting ancient custom. But I do not care at all about their objections” (p. 82).

Although a lifelong celibate and a great advocate of monastic life, St. John had a very positive attitude toward marriage. Citing St. Paul, he insists on the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage: “This [marriage] is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church.” The Christian marriage, including the banquet, is more than a human arrangement. It is a *mysterion*. “This,” he says, “is not an



empty symbol. They (husband and wife) have not become the image of something on earth, but of God Himself” (p. 75). “Sex is not an evil thing. It is adultery that is evil. It is fornication that is evil” (p. 81). “How foolish are those who belittle marriage! If marriage were something to be condemned, Paul would never call Christ a bridegroom and the Church a bride (p. 55). Christ was present at the marriage feast in Cana (p. 81). “Since you know, therefore, how great a mystery that marriage is, and how great a matter it represents, do not consider marriage lightly or casually” (p. 96).

But what is marriage? What makes a Christian marriage different? From the beginning of the creation of man, marriage has been part of the divine plan of God. In one form or other it has existed throughout human history. With the coming of Christ, however, something happened to marriage. It was transformed: “Lo, I come to make all things new.” Central to the Lord’s preaching was that the Kingdom or realm of God was now among us, on this earth. This is absolutely critical. At the Last Supper he announced that he was giving them the Kingdom. (Luke 22:29). The reality of the Kingdom is most present to us in the Eucharist. Historically, the only wedding liturgy was the reception of communion by the couple. Christian life, as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann says, is a series of processions; out of the world into the Church, and thereby into the kingdom. We begin our baptismal procession alone, but our procession around the altar in our wedding is with our spouse. We are walking together into the kingdom. Our married unity is now transformed into holy unity. It is a holy mystery; it is a sacrament. In the mind of St Paul, marriage is the most adequate sign of the unity of Christ and the Church. Without this Christian understanding of marriage, our wedding will be something only human.

With an awareness of why St. John is so critical of the wedding practices of his day, we realize that there is much that he says that is of great value for those preparing for marriage at the present time. For St. John, marriage is something sacred and holy. “Marriage is a bond, a bond ordained by God” (p. 74). God created it (p. 44). “It is a mystery, an image of something far greater. Citing St. Paul, who says, “I take it to mean Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:32), St. John makes a number of observations: “marriage is an image of His presence in the church” (p. 79); “husband and wife are one body in the same way as Christ and the Father are one” (p. 52); “this, then, is what it means to marry in Christ: spiritual marriage is like a spiritual birth” (p. 54); and he instructs us: “Beseech Christ to be present at the wedding,” as “He is not ashamed to come” (p. 79). A Christian marriage is something sacred and holy. It is Christ-centered. Our celebrations throughout the wedding

day must reflect the fundamental holiness and the Christ-centeredness of marriage.

St. John raises a red flag about weddings that may well be applicable to many today: *a marriage is not a pageant or a theatrical drama* (p. 79). If the wedding is seen primarily as a something theatrical, rather than as something sacramental, the celebration of the wedding will reveal it. Those involved may not consciously plan a pageant. They simply want a beautiful wedding, but if they do not see marriage as a religious act, the wedding will take on the characteristics of a pageant. From the outset the bridal couple must consciously choose to plan their wedding, as not only the most important event of their lives, but as something that is an expression of their faith in Christ. If they do so, it will be more than a plan for one day, but for a lifetime. St. John encourages couples to “pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers” (p. 61). “The household is a little church” (p. 57).

The Orthodox Church provides us with a very beautiful wedding ceremony. We need not add to it or take anything from it. As St. John teaches, music should be edifying. This should hold true for the service and the reception. I have attended many wedding receptions. Whether the music was appropriate or not, I could not tell: it was usually so loud that I could not carry on a conversation with anyone where I was seated.

St. John fearlessly goes in where angels fear to tread. He talks about women’s clothing: “Don’t.... spend endless hours worrying about dresses” (p. 79). He calls for the bride to be dressed with dignity. “Don’t adorn the bride with golden ornaments, but dress her modestly” (p. 79). Not all wedding dresses are modest. The fact that the typical wedding dress will only be worn once should make the bride consider the amount of money spent on the dress. She might even ask herself, What is the significance of the dress? St. John calls for modesty and moderation.

St. John tells the wedding couple that it is fitting to have a banquet with their friends to celebrate their marriage (p. 74). “Invite your family, your neighbors and your friends.⁴ Invite as many people as you know who have good character” (p. 79). “When you celebrate the wedding, you may hold a dinner party, but you should not spend a lot of money on decorations, clothing and entertainers. You should not borrow things which may get broken or lost and give you extra worries. If there are songs, they should be edifying songs. There should be spiritual joy instead of drunkenness” (p. 21). St. John is also against dancing at weddings: “Pagan mysteries are the only ones that involve dancing.” We celebrate our mysteries quietly, decently, with reverence

and modesty” (p. 75).

How should a bride or groom take St. John’s advice today? He is not suggesting that a wedding reception be as somber as a wake. Certainly today, music (even bands) and dancing can be a joyful part of a reception. The question today would be, What kind of music and dancing? As in everything else that he says about weddings, nothing should be lewd or unedifying. This will take forethought and planning, however, on the part of the bridal couple.

“There is nothing more pleasurable than virtue, nothing sweeter than orderliness, nothing more honorable than dignity. Those who celebrate weddings such as this will find true pleasure...” (p. 78). We cannot be indifferent to what goes on at wedding celebrations (p. 77).

St. John even has advice for the mothers of the bride. His advice will certainly limit the amount of stress that she will experience. “Let there be no disorderly uproar.... Let there be no drunkenness at the banquets and suppers, but an abundance of spiritual joy. Think of the many good things that will result from weddings like this! The way

most weddings – if we can even call them weddings, and not spectacles – are celebrated nowadays ends in nothing but evil. As soon as the banquet is over, the bride’s mother has to worry anything she has borrowed has been lost or broken, and whatever pleasure she may have had is replaced with distress when she sees what disarray her house is in” (p. 80).

Marriage is a holy mystery and sacrament of the church. It is an act whereby two people join together for a lifelong union in Christ. As Christ was present at the wedding at Cana, He is present in the sacrament of marriage. Why then do priests find weddings problematic? Dealing with stressed out people, of course, can be trying. Yet there is something more troubling. The spiritual element, while not avoided, often takes a back seat in wedding plans. What we might call the simply human dimension of the wedding takes precedence. The priest knows that if he wishes to meet with the couple, he had better do so in the early stages of the planning. The final days before the wedding will be filled with a flurry of activities. Time must be given

to prayerful thought about the holy mystery that will be celebrated by the couple on their wedding day.

The priest is also aware that some persons are marginal members of the Church. Should he marry them? I think most priests are willing to do so, in hopes that the lessons of life will bring them in time to realize their utter dependency on God.

As we have noted, St. John does not discourage the celebration of marriage. What he asks is that marriage be seen for what it is – the joining of a man and woman in Christ – and that the marriage be celebrated in moderation, dignity and modesty.

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Wedding at Cana by Janet Jaime

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

HIS GRACE BISHOP THOMAS BLESSES ST. MARY IN SEPTEMBER

To mark the occasion of their Patronal Feast Day, the Nativity of the Theotokos, Saint Mary's of Hunt Valley, Maryland had the honor of welcoming His Grace Bishop THOMAS to their parish from Wednesday, September 6, to Friday, September 8. The commemoration and celebration began Wednesday evening with a *Paraklesis* service presided over by Bishop THOMAS. Afterwards, His grace met with St. Mary's Young Adult Ministry to enjoy a meal and to answer their questions on Church history, doctrine, and theology. On Friday, September 8, Bishop THOMAS presided over a Vigil for the Nativity of the Theotokos, starting with Great Vespers and Festal Orthros. Before the Divine Hierarchal Liturgy began, His Grace ordained Zade Jabaji as Sub-Deacon Hilarion. Previous to his ordination, Sub-Deacon Hilarion had served the St. Mary's community faithfully as an altar boy and Teen SOYO advisor.

During his three-day visit, His Grace Bishop THOMAS also received updates on the latest developments of St. Mary's building and renovation programs from representatives of the parish, and observed the latest phases of the on-going iconography project.

Thank you, Sayidna, for your love and support and constant prayer for me and my family and parish.

ST. MARY, OMAHA, CELEBRATES 60 YEARS

Congratulations to St. Mary Omaha, Nebraska, for 60 years of the service of God in their community! The anniversary celebration took place the weekend of August 19–20. There was much to celebrate: St. Mary's patronal feast (The Dormition of the Theotokos), V. Rev. Fr. Don Hock's thirty-year anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, and the twenty-fifth year of His Grace Bishop BASIL's service as our Bishop. The weekend included a Teen SOYO Brunch, Banquet and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. There were over 250 attendees worshipping and celebrating with them that weekend.

From the early 1900s to the 1950s many Syrian/Lebanese Christian Orthodox families migrated to the Omaha area. About 1950, they began meeting in family homes and at the Phoenician Club, where they prayed together. They began to lay plans for an Orthodox Church. In 1957, St. Mary Syrian Orthodox Church was officially incorporated under the laws of the State of Nebraska. To support this parish and our priest, Middle East Dinners were initiated and held twice a year, a choir was organized, a Sunday School was established, and a Ladies Guild created, which became well-known for its dedication and support of the church. In October 1992, Very Reverend Fr. Don and his Khouri, Maggie, and their 5 children came to us. By the grace of God and with our devotion and dedication to His Holy Church

we will continue proclaiming the Kingdom of God and expressing it through faith, humility, and good works. May the blessings of the Lord be upon us all, as we continue the journey of salvation!

GATHERING TO THE SHEPHERD: A NIGHT IN HONOR OF BISHOP NICHOLAS

On the evening of September 9, 2017, clergy and faithful from the parishes within the Diocese of New York and Washington, D.C., gathered at St. George in Little Falls to honor their pastor and shepherd, Bishop NICHOLAS. On August 3, 2017, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed Bishop NICHOLAS to the Diocese of Miami and the South East, knowing "his dedication to, and focus on, spreading the word of God," and his effectiveness as a "shepherd and father to all clergy and laity, especially to the teens and young adults." In love for their hierarch and in a thankful spirit, people gathered from around the Diocese both to rejoice in the news and to offer something back to Bishop NICHOLAS.

The evening was spent in fellowship, dining, and the sharing of fond memories. In the midst of laughter and tears, a picture slideshow presented snippets of His Grace's time with the faithful, and audio from teens thanking him for the impact he has made in their lives. During dinner, speakers reflected on their memories of His Grace. Firstly, everyone heard from His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, whose letter spoke of friendship, trust, and

confidence. His Eminence spoke of Bishop NICHOLAS' tirelessness, writing, "I have every confidence that you will ably and lovingly carry on [God's] work and continue to live as an example of a tireless shepherd in the care for your new flock."

Members of the St. George community in Little Falls, the Antiochian Women, and the A-Men Group at St. George, all spoke with great gratitude for His Grace. The Antiochian seminarians, who had the opportunity of being close to their direct overseer, spoke of his high dedication. They spoke of the way that he embodies the role of a true shepherd, guiding them by living example and love. Finally, V. Rev. Father Dimitri Darwich spoke of Bishop NICHOLAS's involvement in his pastoral ministry, the care his flock received from him, and the impact he has made in the Diocese. Lastly, St. George presented His Grace with a beautiful new *engolpion* as a token of their appreciation, and a reminder of all our constant prayers for Bishop NICHOLAS as he takes on this new ministry.

The night ended with a heartfelt speech from His Grace, thanking the entire diocese for the many memories and the deep gratitude they have shown him. Parishioners and clergy lingered well into the night to take pictures, congratulate him, and share a few more memories with His Grace. As the night came to a close, the words of Metropolitan JOSEPH were realized, as everyone left remembering Bishop NICHOLAS's "example of service and tireless work on their behalf."

May God grant Bishop NICHOLAS many years, peace, safety honor, health, and length of days, rightly dividing the word of truth!

ST. ANDREW ORTHODOX CHURCH – FIVE YEARS OF GROWTH

On the weekend of October 15–16, 2017, St. Andrew Church in Lewes, Delaware, welcomed Bishop THOMAS for his annual visit. In addition to admitting six new members into the Order of St. Ignatius, His Grace blessed and dedicated the newly-expanded church facility in the name of our beloved Archpriest Boniface Black, founding pastor of St. Andrew's, who reposed in the Lord in August 2016.

After meeting for five years in rented space, St. Andrew's moved to its new facility in September, 2012, and immediately began to experience a growth in membership – seniors and young families seeking to strengthen their Orthodox faith through the Church. It soon became clear that the new space would need to be expanded.

Building expansion was planned with a commitment that it would proceed only at the pace that funds could be raised to support it, and

that no funds would be borrowed to complete the project. A former model home was purchased and moved to the church property in October 2015. Construction of the new building and renovation of the existing space began immediately. The fundraising and construction were completed in a little over two years. The expanded facility includes a new covered front entry, an expanded nave, new Sunday school classrooms, a larger, more efficient kitchen, a Great Hall, multi-purpose storage areas, and additional restrooms.

Further illumination of the church is being planned, beginning with four new icons on the east wall of the nave.

The faithful of St Andrew Church are grateful to God for continued growth in Christ, as individuals and as a community.



ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS

MERTENS, Christopher, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on November 19, 2017, at St. Basil Church, Hampton, Virginia. He is assigned to that parish.

MOSLENER, Deacon Seraphim, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on November 15, 2017, at the Cathedral of St. George, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is attached to the Church of St. John in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

PHILLIPS, Deacon Jeremiah, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 26, 2017, at St. Andrew Church, Riverside, California.

REPOSED

The Very Reverend Father Emile Hanna, 84, fell asleep in the Lord on November 29, 2017. His wife of 55 years, Claudette (Bourada), son David (Lisa Seaton), daughter Nadine (Jim Potts), and granddaughters Emily, Madeline, Ella, Grace and Lilly, were with him during his final peaceful moments. He was predeceased by his brothers Fayez, Samir, and George, and sisters Sadie and Yvette.

Ghassan O. Sayegh, 86, fell asleep in the Lord on Thursday, November 23, 2017. Ghassan was the loving father of Archdeacon Emile P. Sayegh, Esq., the Chancellor of the Archdiocese, a church leader in Yonkers, New York, and Phoenix, Arizona. He was born in Jordan to Otallah and Martha Khalil Sayegh, and immigrated to the United States (New York) in July 1953, where he was one of the founding members of the parish of the Virgin Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church, Yonkers, New York, under the guidance of their first pastor, then Fr. Philip (Metropolitan PHILIP).

Khouria Lynn Wilson, wife of The Very Rev. Wayne Wilson of St. Barnabas Orthodox Church, Costa Mesa, California, fell asleep in the Lord November 30, 2017. She is survived by her husband, son Peter, daughter-in-law Alexandra, sister Vicki Oswald, and sister-in-law Mary Salazar.

LEST WE FORGET: HONOR WALL

Fr. Antony Gabriel is collecting the names and histories of all of the clergy who have served our Archdiocese from the earliest days until now. Metropolitan JOSEPH has asked Dimitri Zeidan to work with Fr. Antony to preserve and display the materials collected appropriately. It is Fr. Antony's hope that the collected materials will help tell our story, which is our history. This will allow generations in the future to benefit from the experience of those who came before them and to help them understand better their spiritual lineage in Christ through His Church. See Fr. Antony's book for examples of the kind of stories that make up our history. These stories make us laugh and cry. They offer insights and data that will allow us to better serve our Lord.

Contact Fr. Antony Gabriel at economosantony@gmail.com, phone 520-529-5873, or by mail, and send materials to his home at 6202 N Via Tres Patos, Tucson AZ 85750.

MOSLENER, Deacon Seraphim, was elevated to the Holy Priesthood at the hand of His Grace Bishop THOMAS on November 15, 2017, at St. George Cathedral in Oakland (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). His sponsors were Fr. Christopher Davis and Fr. Paul Abernathy. Bishop THOMAS served a Hierarchical Liturgy with Fr. Joshua Makoul serving in the altar. Also in attendance were visiting clergy, mothers and sisters from Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, and members of Fr. Seraphim's family. Fr. Seraphim has been assigned to St. John the Evangelist Parish in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, where he currently directs the FOCUS West Central Pennsylvania ministry for Beaver and Lawrence Counties, until such time as a full-time director is found.

2018 PLC Schedule

Diocese of Worcester
Hosted by: Diocese Ministry Council, held at St. John of Damascus Church, Dedham, MA
June 9 & June 23-24, 2018

Diocese of Miami
Hosted by: St. Mary Church, West Palm Beach, FL
June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Wichita
Hosted by: Holy Trinity Church, Santa Fe, NM
June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Toledo
Hosted by: St. Elias Church, Sylvania, OH
June 20-24, 2018

Dioceses of New York and Washington D.C. & Oakland, Charleston and Mid-Atlantic
Hosted by: St. Philip (Souderton, PA); St. George (Upper Darby, PA) & Holy Ascension (West Chester, PA) Churches; held at Antiochian Village
June 27-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Ottawa
Hosted by: St. Anthony (St. Antonios) Church, Halifax, NS
June 28-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Los Angeles/Eagle River
Hosted by: St. George Church, Portland, OR
July 4-8, 2018

Clergy Symposium
Antiochian Village July 16-20

2019 Archdiocese Convention
54th Bi-annual Archdiocese Convention
St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, MI
July 21-28, 2019



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OF
South Carolina

Christ Awakens My Personhood
St. Thekla
Summer 2018

Registration and Staff Applications Available

Online January 1st

www.campsthekla.org/

2018 Camp Dates **Ages 9-17**

June 24 - June 30

July 1 - July 7

- Creek Hikes
- Lake Access
- Ropes Course
- 3 Outdoor Chapels
- Modern Cabins with Air Conditioning
- 4 Square, Gaga Ball, Carpet Ball, Angle Ball

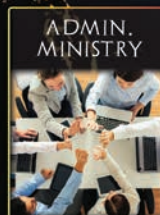
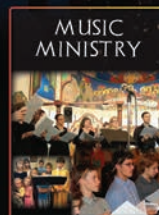
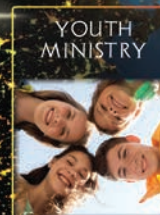
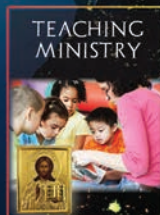


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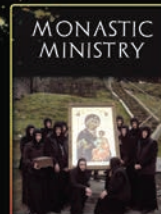
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STRENGTHENING THE MINISTRIES OF OUR CHURCH

VOCATIONS



Encouraging
Supporting
Funding



ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN
2018 NAB PROJECT

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA - NORTH AMERICAN BOARD

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The Order of St. Ignatius Supports
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Syrian Relief Fund

Hope is the "real" gift you give that provides a needed "hand up" to the lives of those struggling to provide the basic necessities for their children and families.

The 3 Tenets & Governing Principle Of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Let no man's place, or dignity, or riches, puff him up; and let no man's low condition or poverty abase him.
For the chief points are faith towards God, hope towards Christ, the enjoyment of those good things for which we look, and love towards God and our neighbor.

- Saint Ignatius of Antioch

Act of Faith

Rooted in Love &
Compassion

All the way back to our earliest years as a child we are taught to share with others, especially those less fortunate. When we share, we give up what we believe to be control in our lives and put our faith in God that He will provide for our needs in abundance. Through your financial commitment you are allowing God to work through you for the benefit of others. Your gift to the Order is an expression of love and compassion for countless lives and most importantly ... it is an act of Faith.

A Sacrifice

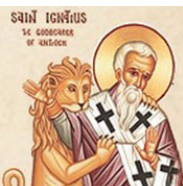
Immeasurable In Its
Capacity

To sacrifice for one another is to love. Deciding to "do without" for the benefit of someone you don't know is the beginning of a true sacrifice. Your sacrifice helps a struggling family send their children to camp enabling them to experience God's world if only for two weeks. It provides reassurance to a new parish, that it can meet its monthly financial obligations and continue its ministry. As a member of the Order you may consider your sacrifice to be small, but it is immeasurable in its capacity to change people's lives.

Infinite in Its Effect

Making A Difference
Together

Your annual gift, less than the cost of your daily cup of coffee, is merely a drop of water in a vast ocean of need. However, the ripple from your gift never ends. It expands to enrich the lives of our youth strengthening their hearts and minds as future leaders of the Faith. It multiplies to help care for our retired clergy and our devoted seminarians. The ripple from your annual or lifetime gift touches the lives of so many that you would never have been able to reach alone.



ORDER OF ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH
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