

## THE MYRRH-BEARERS AT THE SEPULCHER



*Be not amazed: ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene,  
who hath been crucified: he is risen; he is not here*



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# The Word



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

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EDITORIAL

## Stewardship and Pascha

I ONCE HEARD A COMPLAINT ABOUT A PRIEST WHO PREACHED ABOUT STEWARDSHIP ON PASCHA. ON THE FEAST OF FEAST, THE HOLY DAY OF HOLY DAYS, HOW COULD A PRIEST TALK ABOUT STEWARDSHIP?

In his book, *The Resurrection of Modern Man*, Patriarch IG-NATIUS IV of blessed memory offers us a vision of the modern world through the lens of the empty tomb of Christ. This Patriarch challenges us to live in the moment, and in this moment Christ is Risen. Christ has accomplished everything for us to be able to share His life for eternity. That eternity is now, because Christ is Risen and all is accomplished. The Resurrection of Christ cannot be reduced to a mere historic event. Through Incarnation, Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection, Christ joins us in every aspect of our humanity and lives. He comes to us from outside of time and embraces us as the Existing One now.

Because Christ is Risen now, we must respond to Him, the Resurrected One, *now*. We need to respond to the empty tomb and the gifts and challenges of our baptism *now*. The only reasonable response of those who have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ is to share in His ministry and do what He does. Christ praises the Father and takes care of the world. Christ stands with us before God and with God for us. He shares Himself. In caring for His world, and in the light of the empty tomb, we need to worship God and take care of each other. We need to do this in a way that reflects who God



Icon by Janet Jaime

is, that is, how we are created to be. God loves, so we love; He cares, so we care; He protects, feeds and comforts, so we do, too. Through the Church, God gives us the way to share our gifts and responsibilities.

The Church teaches us how to be in Christ and how to do His ministry. It gives us a family that can make up for whatever might be lacking in our relationships at home. The Church is an extended family that can share practical wisdom, allowing us to grow in healthy ways. The Church is a place where we can give. God gives us everything, and no one can out-give God.

The Church offers a safe and easy way to give, so that ministry can happen in and outside the parish community. The Church is the place where we can be fed spiritually and physically. Breaking bread together allows us to share life, God's life, with each other. The Church is where we can be challenged and corrected. No one can see themselves entirely objectively. Safe and holy relationships can offer us opportunities to repent and grow.

God doesn't need money. Our God is so not needy. He *is*, even before He created, and He was complete as Trinity. Because the Father loves the Son and Spirit, to be like Him we need to love. That love looks like giving and doing ministry. As He gives



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and does ministry, so, too, must we give and do, to share in His life. God doesn't need money, but to be like God we need to give. Give time, energy, and resources. The Church allows us to give and makes us Christian. I dare say the Church makes us truly human. The Church lets us be who we are baptized to be, and do what we are called to do.

A steward cares for something on behalf of its owner. The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord. We are to care for the gifts the world presents, even multiply them, on behalf of the Lord who chooses to create, love and care for us. Let us be wise in our stewardship. Faithfulness leads to contentment and joy.

A sermon on stewardship of Pascha sounds right on to me. It's all about seeing the world through the lens of Resurrection, in the light of the empty tomb. Christ is Risen!

Bishop JOHN

## ARCHDIOCESE OFFICE

### ORDAINED

LONG, Elisha, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on April 3, 2016, at St. Elias Church, Austin, Texas. He is assigned to that parish.

MACKOUL, Alexander, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on April 6, 2016, at St. George Cathedral, Worcester, Massachusetts. He is completing his studies at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

NISHIEWAT, Bassilios (Munther), to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on March 13, 2016, at St. James Church, Poughkeepsie, New York. He is attached to St. James Church.

### CLERGY TRANSFERS

DAVIS, Fr. Jeremy, from the assistant pastorate at St. Elijah, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to the pastorate at Holy Ascension Church, Norman, Oklahoma, effective March 13, 2016.

### DEPARTED

Khouria Marguerite Shaheen, wife of Archpriest George F. Shaheen (reposed), fell asleep in the Lord on Sunday March 20, 2016, surrounded by her family. With her husband, she served parishes in Montreal, Quebec; Toledo, Ohio; Charleston, West Virginia; Syracuse, New York; Louisville, Kentucky; Cambridge and Worcester, Massachusetts; as well as several mission parishes. During the last nine years she was a member of St. George Orthodox Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She loved cooking, knitting, crocheting, embroidery and spending time with her family and her many friends. Marguerite had deep faith, lived the Gospel and passed the great faith to her family and friends. These words best describe Marguerite: deeply pious, generous, compassionate and courageous. She gave the inspiration of hope to all. Marguerite's memory will be cherished by all who knew and loved her.

### GIFT OF *The WORD* TO *The WORD*

A set of *Al-Kalamat* editions, published by Bishop RAPHAEL (Hawaweeny), was given to the Archdiocese by Lila Bargoot and her late husband, John, from St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church on May 20, 2012. We gratefully acknowledge their donation. This and other such gifts are housed at the Antiochian Village Library.



## Witnessing to Evangelicals

Fr. Philip LeMasters

HAVING TAUGHT COLLEGE-LEVEL RELIGION CLASSES FOR 25 YEARS NOW, I HAVE KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME THAT IT CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS FROM ANY FAITH BACKGROUND TO INTERPRET FAIRLY THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF OTHER COMMUNITIES. IN MY EXPERIENCE, THAT IS ESPECIALLY THE CASE FOR MANY EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS WHEN THEY ENCOUNTER JUST ABOUT ANYTHING THAT LOOKS “TOO CATHOLIC.” HAVING GROWN UP A SOUTHERN BAPTIST IN TEXAS AND HAVING TAUGHT NOW FOR OVER 20 YEARS AT A METHODIST-RELATED INSTITUTION, I HAVE NOT BEEN SURPRISED TO HAVE STUDENTS WHO SEEM ALLERGIC TO PRACTICES THEY IDENTIFY WITH THE ABUSES OF ROME AS REJECTED BY THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION. THIS SEMESTER'S STUDENTS IN MY ORTHODOX THEOLOGY COURSE HAVE HELPED ME LEARN HOW TO ADDRESS THESE DYNAMICS WITH A BIT MORE CLARITY.

As they were reading the treatises of St. John of Damascus in defense of the holy icons, some of my students took objection to his claim that the saints are due honor because they partake by grace in the divine glory. An implication of that claim is that to refuse to honor the saints is to refuse also to give proper glory to God, for it is

His glory in which the saints participate. How, then, could any Christian fail to honor those who shine with holy light? Some students suggested that to honor the icons of saints, to ask for their prayers, and to remem-

ber them liturgically, puts people at risk of worshiping the saints instead of God, of committing idolatry. In response, I explained that Orthodoxy formally distin-

**Orthodox veneration of the saints manifests belief in *theosis*, that human beings become participants in the divine energies like an iron left in the fire.**

guishes between *veneration* and *worship*, and that there is so much in the life of the Church, and in the spiritual formation of Orthodox believers, to guard against such abuses. They remained skeptical, however.



It occurred to me a few days after that class that the students were probably imagining what would happen if the veneration of saints and icons suddenly were



Icon by Randi Sider-Rose

Fr. Philip LeMasters, Ph.D.  
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made part of the worship of the Methodist congregations to which they belonged. As is perfectly understandable, they were thinking in light of their own experience. Since the theological sensibilities of Protestantism developed in opposition to the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, how could they not be suspicious of restoring practices that the Reformers rejected and that are essentially unknown in their communities?

As well, I realized that Orthodox veneration of the saints manifests belief in *theosis*, that human beings become participants in the divine energies like an iron left in the fire. They shine with the divine glory as they become holy through their participation in the life of the Holy Trinity by grace. From its origins, the Church has glorified God by celebrating those in whom we have experienced His holiness. They show us what it means for people, every bit as human as we are, to be so united with the New Adam that they becoming living icons of the fulfillment of our nature as those created in God’s image and likeness. Since Orthodoxy is clear about the

radical difference between worship and veneration, there is no threat of idolatry here. Likewise, the iconoclasts challenged the experience of the Church from her origins. They were the innovators, insisting that what they did not like be ripped out of the life of the Body of Christ, irrespective of the scandal and harm caused to the people of God.

The next time that class met, I urged my students to remember that St. John of Damascus was speaking in a Church with well-established understandings of *theosis*, of the difference between worship and veneration, and centuries of experience in honoring and asking for the prayers of the saints. He was not addressing Protestants with no concept of deification. He was not addressing communities that had refused to venerate the saints for five hundred years, that had identified that practice with later abuses in the West, or that had affirmed *sola scriptura*. My students may make of these matters what they will, but I suggested that it is probably not helpful to reduce the issue simply to speculation on what would happen if they started venerating saints tomorrow in their own congregations.

Instead, they would do well to wrestle with their relationship to the “great cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 12 that inspires us to look to Christ as we continue the race. There is no competition between honoring those holy people and worshipping the Lord in that passage. They would benefit from engaging the status of the martyrs described in Revelation 6 and the reference to the prayers of the saints rising with incense in Revelation 8. In other words, their traditions should encourage them to engage the Bible on these matters, including the miracles worked by the bones of Elisha in the Old Testament (2 Kings 13:21) and the shadow, handkerchiefs, and aprons of the Apostles in the New Testament (Acts 5:15, 19:12). Since Protestants are supposed to judge tradition by Scripture, they should consider whether their traditions have done justice to the teachings of the Bible on these matters. Some of my former students have become Orthodox as a result of wrestling with such questions, but what they do with my suggestions is ultimately up to them.

Enthusiastic veneration of the saints and their icons did not break out spontaneously that day in class, but I could tell that the students were open to seeing these matters in a new light, and not in a way that is entirely captive to their own experience. That is surely one of the most important dimensions of higher education. Maybe there is some point to what I have had the blessing to do now for 25 years.

# Ancient Traditions, New Beginnings

Rev. Prior Dom Theodore



THE STARS TWINKLE IN THE DARK SKY BY THEIR THOUSANDS. THE WHISPER OF A GENTLE BREEZE THROUGH THE PINES AND ASPENS MINGLES WITH THE GURGLING OF A SWIFTLY FLOWING STREAM. LIGHTS BLINK ON IN WINDOWS, AS PEOPLE AWAKE AND SHAKE OFF THE DROWSINESS OF SLUMBER. IT IS HALF-PAST FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE MORNING: SOON, THE CHURCH’S TIMELESS PRAISE OF GOD WILL RESUME ITS DAILY ROUND WITH THE PSALMS, HYMNS, AND PRAYERS OF MATINS (EQUIVALENT TO THE MIDNIGHT OFFICE, OR VIGILS, IN THE BYZANTINE TRADITION). THUS BEGINS A NEW DAY AT THE MONASTERY OF OUR LADY AND SAINT LAURENCE, HIGH IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS OF COLORADO.

Founded on Holy Cross Day of 2013, the monastery is under the patronage of Our Lady of Glastonbury (an ancient, English title of the Mother of God, associated with the very beginnings of Christianity in Britain) and of St. Laurence, Archdeacon and Martyr of Rome. The monastic community was blessed with canonical recognition by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH in July of 2015 as one of the rare, dual monasteries<sup>1</sup> in modern Orthodoxy.

The monastics follow the ancient *Rule for Monasteries* of St. Benedict of Nursia (d. 547) and worship according to the authorized Western Orthodox Liturgies

of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese’s Western Rite Vicariate.

St. Benedict composed his *Rule* around 542 A.D., combining the wisdom of earlier monastic Fathers with his own experience as an ascetic, abbot, and wise guide of souls. Among his major sources were the ascetical writings of St. Basil the Great, St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. John Cassian the Roman. His own unique contributions to the rich heritage of Orthodox monastic wisdom shine throughout this scripturally based, psychologically balanced, and prayerfully synthesized presentation of the monastic tradition as it had developed in the Roman



1. This is a monastery that includes both monks and nuns. The best known contemporary dual monastery is St. John the Baptist, Essex, England, founded by the ever-memorable Elder Sophrony (Sakarov).
2. *Rule*, Chapter 16.
3. *Purpose Statement*, Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence, Inc.
4. In Western monastic tradition, a *prior* (meaning “elder,” or “one who is superior in rank”) is either the second-in-charge after an abbot or, as at our monastery, a monastic superior who has not yet been given the rank of abbot.
5. Galatians 6:2.

world up to his time.

Pope St. Gregory the Great, also known as the “Dialogist,” whom we venerate as a liturgist and Father of the Church, promoted the witness of St. Benedict and the wisdom of the *Rule* in Book II of his *Dialogues*. Through him, St. Benedict became known throughout the Orthodox world. He is hymned in the East as the “sun that shinest with the Mystic Dayspring’s radiance, who didst enlighten the monastics of the western lands, [who] art worthily the namesake of benediction ...” (*Kontakion* for the Feast of St. Benedict of Nursia). Over time, his *Rule* gradually supplanted the Gallic and Celtic forms of monasticism that had previously flourished in western Europe.

In 985, St. Athanasios of Mount Athos, founder of the Great Lavra, invited monks from Amalfi, Italy, to found the Monastery of St. Mary of the Latins, also known as the *Amalfion*, on Mount Athos. One of the ruling monasteries of the Holy Mountain, the community observed the *Rule* of St. Benedict and celebrated the traditional Latin Orthodox Liturgy. It survived until 1287, when it succumbed to a lack of vocations from the West because of the deepening of the Great Schism and the effects of the tragic Fourth Crusade. Its ruined tower still stands on

the Holy Mountain, a silent reminder that the truth and beauty of the Orthodox Faith transcend the confines of geography, language, or cultural identity.

St. Benedict’s monasticism is classically *cenobitic* in nature (from the Greek *koinos*, or “common,” and *bios*, or “life”). In the Prologue to the *Rule*, he expresses his intention to “establish a school of the Lord’s service; in founding which we hope to ordain nothing that is harsh or burdensome.” Interestingly, the word used for “school” is *schola*, the same word as in the expression, *schola cantorum*, a group of persons who are learning to sing together harmoniously. In the first Chapter, he expresses his conviction that cenobites are a “strong race,” by reason of having a fixed rule of life, the guidance and correction of an abbot, and the example and support of brothers. Throughout the *Rule*, he insists on the necessity of remaining stable in the monastery and in the fellowship of the community, of holding all property in common, and of the renunciation of self-will not only through obedience to the abbot, but through mutual submission to one’s brethren and strict adherence to the precepts of the *Rule*.

The framework upon which St. Benedict erects cenobitic life is the *Opus Dei* (Work of God), also called the *Divine Office*. This consists of eight services of prayer spaced throughout the night and day: Vespers, Compline, Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, and None. (In Byzantine use, these eight services are commonly known, collectively, as “The Hours.”) This cycle is expressive of two verses of Scripture, both cited in the *Rule*: “Seven times a day have I given praise to thee” (Psalm 118 [119]:164), and “At midnight I rose to give praise to thee” (Psalm 118 [119]: 62).<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass (Divine Liturgy) is normally celebrated daily, in keeping with the ancient custom of the Orthodox in the West. Our personal prayer, study, reflection, and service, flow out from this corporate worship and back into it, as we listen and respond to Christ in the Psalter, Readings from Scripture and the Fathers, and the Hymns of the Church (many of which date back to St. Ambrose of Milan and other early, Western saints).

Of course, there is much more to monastic life than singing services in the Oratory or praying alone in one’s cell! The traditional motto of Benedictines, *Ora et labora*, “Pray and Work,” sums up the way in which the *Rule* divides the day into roughly three equal parts: corporate worship, spiritual reading and personal prayer; manual and intellectual labor; and rest.

At Our Lady and Saint Laurence, we strive to be productive through manual and intellectual labor, arts and crafts, assisting with the work of Lancelot Andrewes Press

(a ministry of the Benedictine Fellowship), and a limited amount of outreach to the wider Church in the form of preaching, leading retreats, and spiritual fellowship and guidance. Work is assigned under obedience and is done not for one’s own satisfaction, but in order to avoid idleness, support the community, and enable us to share our resources with others who are in need. The intimate relationship between our work and our worship is admirably expressed in the motto of the monastery: “Active in Prayer and Prayerful in Action.”

The monastery is truly blessed to reside on a remote, six-hundred-acre mountain campus, located a little over 30 miles from Cañon City, Colorado, at about 7,500 feet above sea-level. The property is owned by the Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence, an independent not-for-profit corporation, founded in 2004 by the Very Rev. John C. Connely and members of St. Mark’s Orthodox Church, Denver. Its mission is “to bring men and women to faith in Jesus Christ through the practice of the Scriptural Rule of St. Benedict.”<sup>3</sup> The monastic community participates in that mission by providing on-site care of the property, ongoing worship, spiritual counsel, and warm hospitality to all who would follow the Lord’s advice to his disciples, “Come away to a quiet place ... and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31).

At the heart of this large property, the monastic residence and retreat center are situated in a small valley. The oldest building is St. Herman’s Lodge, a two-story log house, which was originally a hunting lodge. It now contains guest accommodations and a large kitchen/dining area, and a cozy common room. The monastic cells, winter kitchen and refectory, library, additional guest rooms, work areas, and the Oratory of St. Laurence (chapel) are located in a basilica-style building that was completed in 2009. An additional cottage, St. Audrey’s, was completed in 2012 and is currently occupied by Dame Sophia, one of the monastery’s co-founders.

In keeping with the admonition of St. Benedict in Chapter 53 of his *Rule* that “all guests that come be received like Christ,” hospitality is a valued feature of our monastic discipline. Under the direction of the Prior<sup>4</sup> (who is also the Retreat Center guest master), the monastics welcome individual guests and larger groups to make use of the facilities throughout the year. Guests are encouraged to participate in the monastery’s daily worship, meals, and routine; they are also welcome to seek counsel from those of the monastics whom the Prior has blessed for that purpose. Individual guests are never charged a fee for their room or board (reasonable fees are applied to groups). By God’s providence, the free-will donations



of our guests have grown to provide a significant part of the money required to sustain the monastic community.

Under the leadership of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and his brother Hierarchs, our Archdiocese is experiencing a gradual flowering of monastic life. Here at the Monastery, it is our humble, fervent prayer that we may be a godly part of this new beginning, with a particular emphasis on the ancient but timeless wisdom of St. Benedict, Patriarch of Western Orthodox monasticism. We invite our Antiochian brothers and sisters, together with all Orthodox Christians, to take part in this monastic springtime by offering prayer, encouraging vocations, and giving material support not only to us, but to all our fledgling monastic communities. May God grant that each of us, within our particular vocation, answer the call of the Apostle to “bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ,”<sup>5</sup> to the Glory of God and the honor of the Orthodox Church, the true beacon and ark of salvation in this world.

For more information on the Monastery or the St. Laurence Center, please visit [www.saintlaurenceosb.org](http://www.saintlaurenceosb.org), or contact the Father Prior at [monk.theodore@gmail.com](mailto:monk.theodore@gmail.com).

Rev. Prior Dom Theodore of Tallahassee Creek



Far left above: Bishop John’s talk at 2014 Pilgrimage  
Far left below: Church from the lodge porch  
Above: Monastic Cells  
Below: Vespers



# Learning to Listen

Luke Bullock

**LISTENING SOUNDS EASY, BUT IT IS AN ELUSIVE ART FORM. WE ALL CAN RELATE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SITTING ACROSS FROM SOMEONE AND KNOWING THAT HE OR SHE IS HEARING NOT WHAT WE ARE SAYING, BUT WHAT HE OR SHE WANTS TO HEAR. DISCUSSIONS OFTEN UNRAVEL AS EACH SIDE SPEAKS PAST THE OTHER. IN ARGUMENTS, COMMONLY THE INTERLOCUTORS FOCUS LESS ON UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER SIDE THAN ON THE NEXT ARGUMENT TO BE MADE. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE FAILED TO LISTEN BECAUSE WE WERE JUST TOO BUSY TALKING? THE “ART” OF LISTENING IS JUST THAT: AN ART FORM THAT TAKES PRACTICE TO PERFECT. MASTERING IT COSTS NOTHING BUT THE COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE AND REFLECT AND TRY AGAIN. IT COSTS LITTLE, BUT REAPS HUGE DIVIDENDS. LISTENING IS ESSENTIAL TO LEARNING TO LOVE.**

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

## LISTENING AS A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

Consider the nature of listening to someone else. On the one hand, it is about the other person: when I am truly listening, I attend to the other person, his words, his story, his emotions. On the other hand, listening is about me. What the other person says can trigger so many emotions and thoughts. I react, I reply. If I am going to listen well, I have to recognize my reactions and to know how I want to respond. Only by emptying myself, stepping out of the way, can I be fully present with the other person in his situation.

The Cross of Jesus manifests the victory of self-emptying – *kenosis*. Through taking a body and soul, dying, and rising again, the Word of God made Himself known as He is: the co-suffering God of love. He is the Mystery. Jesus – the image of the Father – refashioned humanity in his image, thus making known God the Father. The Crucified Christ came, according to the Scriptures, to restore humanity from death to life. As St. Paul exhorts, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

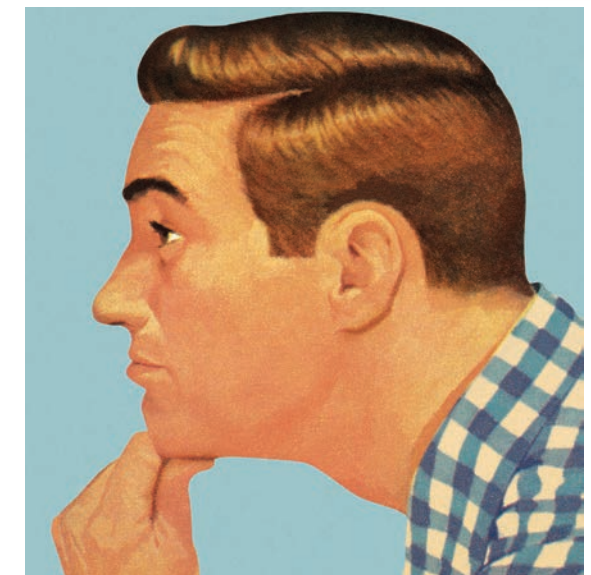
Crucified love defines the Christian life and, thus, the purpose of listening. First and foremost, I enter into relationships, speaking and listening, in order to learn to love. In myself I have needs, but to follow Him the primary need is for me to die, to become small, to be humbled, to be emptied. Each encounter with another person provides an opportunity to learn humility. Secondly, conversations provide an opportunity for the other person to experience love. Inviting him to share, hearing his stories, empathetically responding: all of these are premised on love. As a Christian, I walk with others in their sufferings, as Christ walked with us all in our humanity. Only through listening can I authentically form relationships.

## THE KEYS OF LISTENING WELL

First, let the other person talk. Does this instruction, as simple as it is, make you smile? To listen, we have to give space to the other to use his voice. This is obvious, but it’s essential – and often harder than we would like to admit. Some of us, more than others, need to resist the temptation to monopolize conversation. If you like to dominate a situation, or feel you know everything there is to know about a subject, you might be a poor listener.

It takes self-control to remain open to new ideas instead of impatiently waiting for a chance to butt in with what you think is the final word. Before you speak, make sure that the speaker has had a chance to make his point. Many people think aloud and tend to grope toward their meaning. Their initial statements may be only a vague approximation of what they mean. Forget about what you were going to say next. Make sure you hear what the other person says. As the Apostle James says, “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19).

Second, listen with gentle curiosity. Avoid judging the speaker too soon. The goal of listening is not to refrain from speaking, but to hear with understanding and



kindness. Abba Poemen once said, “A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.” Taking a non-judgmental approach means respecting the person, valuing him in his uniqueness, giving him space to articulate his opinions and beliefs, with the intention of understanding his needs and struggles.

Third, listen for different levels of significance. Suppose you bump into a friend who says, “What a day!” What does your friend mean? You see that the words themselves don’t tell the whole story. Body language and tone of voice will give you a clue. Your friend might be saying, “What a great day! Let’s celebrate!” Or your friend might mean, “What a rotten day! Let’s drink our worries away.” This is really the surface of things. There are other layers to the story. Perhaps this friend needs you to empathize with him. Perhaps he experienced a



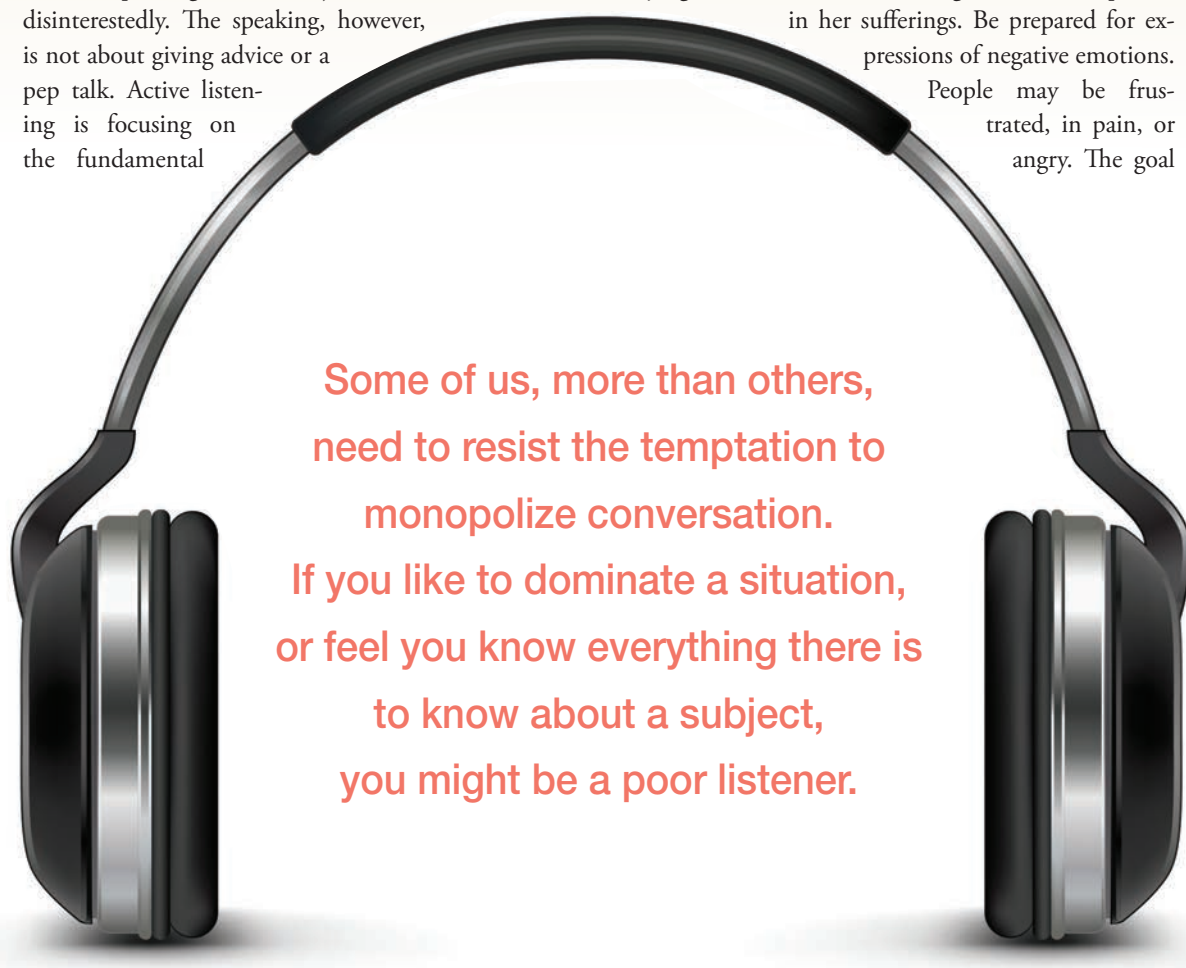
huge change in his life. Or perhaps your friend is continually going through drama. When we listen, we listen to the story. What's the main idea? Why *this* story, now? The speaker before you is a deep and mysterious person. He has many sides to his personal reality. Truly listening means to be open to entering the dimensions and depths of another person's experiences.

Fourth, practice active listening. Effective listening involves speaking. You don't just sit and listen disinterestedly. The speaking, however, is not about giving advice or a pep talk. Active listening is focusing on the fundamental

meaning and feelings expressed by the other. As Dr. Al Rossi, a Professor at St. Vladimir's Seminary, states, "Active listening absorbs the meaning and feelings of the other and demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the other, that we actually heard what was said . . . [A]ctive listening is not judgmental, nor critical, nor patronizing, nor advice-giving."<sup>1</sup> The purpose is not to fix problems, but to let the other person know that we hear what she is saying. This often means walking with another person

in her sufferings. Be prepared for expressions of negative emotions.

People may be frustrated, in pain, or angry. The goal



is to understand the other person. Help the other person "process" something or express herself. Sometimes this means that we share in the other's joy. At times it means suffering with her. So when we walk with someone in her dark valley, we invite her to speak the truth of her life and release some of the spiritual "pus" – the darkness, the sin, the negative thoughts, the emotions, the hurts, and the tears.

Active listening may involve different techniques, such as open-ended questions, "empathy guesses," and reflective statements. We ask questions not to control the conversation, but to invite the other person to tell

her story or get a chance to make her point. A closed-ended question might be, "What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?" The question does not invite more than a factual response – "mint chocolate chip." An open-ended question might be, "What is your earliest memory of ice cream?" This opens up a story, one that allows the other person to share something from his life. When we listen to others, rather than focusing on factual questions, we want to tune into their stories. How do they feel? Perhaps we offer them an empathy guess: It sounds like you are . . . (*exhausted, angry, sad, ecstatic*). The simplest and perhaps most profound technique of active listening is

offering a reflective statement, a short declarative sentence summarizing what the other person has said. This sentence implicitly asks the question, "Is this what you mean?" or "Do I understand you correctly?" Reflective statements are supportive because they show your interest and reduce the chance for misunderstanding.

#### LISTENING AS AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AMERICA

Most of us find our lives not to be very communal. More and more, the surrounding culture encourages us to focus on ourselves narcissistically. Social networking is about talking and much less about listening. Talk radio is about shouting people down and denying them the opportunity to state their opinions. The Church, though, offers a place to learn and practice authentic listening. We listen through confession. The priest witnesses our confession to God. And if the priest is truly listening, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he will have insight into our situation. And then, we receive his word as if directly from God himself. Confession requires listening at these three levels – the priest, God, and ourselves. In prayer and in silence, we journey deeper. This is listening that we often want to skip and pass over. Instead, we slide towards distractions – email, social media, sports, gossip, the news – rather than giving those spare minutes to resting in silence.

The Liturgy, the center of our communal life in Christ, involves listening to the Word of God, the crucified Messiah. At the Transfiguration we heard the voice of the Father, speaking "out of the cloud, 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him'" (Mark 9:7). At each liturgy, we listen to the Gospel, to the words of Christ. What do we hear? Do the words take root in our heart? Do the words settle in our minds, becoming words repeated to others without letting them transform our own lives? Let us listen to the words of the liturgy – the readings, the sermon, the hymns – letting them penetrate our hearts and minds. As St. James exhorts, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). The hope of every Christian is to find the echo of God's voice within our own hearts and to be transformed through the Holy Spirit. This process, one of sanctification, starts with listening, learning to love. We listen to the Word of God and, through doing what He says, become ourselves a living word of God.

May we learn to listen in humility to those around us and, through this act of love, build up the body of Christ.

## New FOCUS Office Established in Pennsylvania

The office of FOCUS West Central Pennsylvania was blessed on March 10, 2016, by Fr. Chris Davis of St. John the Evangelist Orthodox Church, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The parish offered an apartment of two rooms in its lower hall as a temporary office until a permanent one can be found. The event was the capstone to the work of over thirty volunteers from six Orthodox parishes in Beaver and Lawrence Counties working together over the past fourteen months under guidance and support from Deacon Paul Abernathy, Director of FOCUS Pittsburgh. In January of this year, the Board was formally organized, with Fr. Kevin Long of St. Elias Parish, New Castle, elected as Chair. In February, Deacon Seraphim Moslener of St. John the Evangelist Parish was appointed Ministry Coordinator. The office is scheduled to open with services to the public in early May. Current planning includes the provision of hygiene kits for homeless men; emergency food bags for those referred from area pastors, schools, and agency persons; a monthly breakfast for homeless and hungry people in the area; and a backpack feeding program for students by early fall. The address for the FOCUS West Central PA office is 1501 Eighth Ave, Beaver Falls, PA 15010. The expansion of FOCUS has occurred with the prayers and support of His Grace Bishop THOMAS and a number of Orthodox clergy in the area.

Deacon Seraphim Moslener, Father Chris Davis, and Deacon Paul Abernathy



1. Al Rossi, "Active Listening to Enrich the Church," Jacob's Well, Summer/Fall 2012.



Lule, a mother of 10 children, lost 25 of her cattle because of the drought, and struggles to save her remaining two. Ethiopia is in the grip of the worst drought in 30 years. IOCC, an ACT member, is providing much needed water for livestock. Livestock is the only source of income for many rural families in the drought-stricken country. Credit: WFP



International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is responding to the urgent needs of families in Ethiopia, which are suffering through the most severe drought in 30 years. More than 10 million people face severe hunger and loss of livestock across the dry and barren plains of western Ethiopia.

Tilahun, a 53-year-old cow-herder, is at risk of losing his two newborn calves and only source of income. The cows in his small herd have stopped giving milk because of a lack of water and feed. The father of nine children says each day becomes more uncertain. “We’ve had drought before, but we would move our animals to graze in the neighboring Afar region, or they came to us when they had drought. This year both regions are affected, and the drought is affecting both people and animals, which makes it difficult,” said Tilahun.

IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, is working with its church partner, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission, to install five large-capacity water tanks in the country’s hard hit North Shewa Zone of the Amhara region. IOCC is also providing water needed for livestock in remote, drought-hit communities, where little emergency relief assistance is currently available.

Water is desperately needed to spare the small herd of cattle owned by Shiferaw, 75. The nearest water source in the region is a six-hour round-trip walk from his home. “I don’t remember this kind of drought in my life,” he recalled. “Because of the long distance to the river, our animals are able to reach water only once every three days.” The poor harvest of *teff*, a nutritious staple grain in the Ethiopian diet, has also severely cut Shiferaw’s income and his source of food for his wife and three children. He had

to sell one of his seven cows to buy food for his family.

The lack of rain during the country’s short but critical rainy season has led to a severe shortage of water, and caused widespread crop failure. Furthermore, over 400,000 livestock have died – a stark reminder of how fragile the food supply can become when growing conditions are severely affected.

#### *How You Can Help*

You can help the victims of poverty and conflicts around the world, like those suffering from drought in Ethiopia, by making a financial gift to the International Emergency Response Fund. This will provide immediate relief, as well as long-term support, in the form of emergency aid and recovery assistance, among other things. To make a gift, please visit [www.iocc.org](http://www.iocc.org), or call, toll-free, 1-877-803-IOCC (4622), or mail a check or money order payable to IOCC, P.O. Box 17398, Baltimore, MD 21297.

#### *About International Orthodox Christian Charities*

IOCC is the official humanitarian aid agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC has delivered \$580 million in relief and development programs to families and communities in more than 50 countries. IOCC is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of more than 140 churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy, and a member of InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based secular and faith-based organizations working to improve the lives of the world’s most poor and vulnerable populations. To learn more about IOCC, visit [www.iocc.org](http://www.iocc.org).

Media contact: Rada K. Tierney, IOCC Media Relations, 443-823-3489, [rtierney@iocc.org](mailto:rtierney@iocc.org)

## ARCHDIOCESE ORGANIZATIONS MEET FOR 2016 MID-WINTER MEETINGS



Officers and leaders from the Antiochian Women, Young Adult Ministry (the former Fellowship of St. John the Divine), and Teen SOYO representing all nine Dioceses of our God-protected Archdiocese attended the Mid-Winter Meetings, March 4-6, 2016. With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, the meetings were held this year at St. Luke Church in Garden Grove, CA, and had 78 attendees. We were blessed to have His Grace Bishop JOHN, the NAB Antiochian Women’s Spiritual Advisor, preside.

The weekend began with the Spiritual Advisors and Youth Directors of SOYO arriving first on Thursday to meet on Thursday night and Friday to discuss programming efforts for SOYO for the coming year. The rest of the participants arrived on Friday, and we began with Vespers, followed by dinner at the church, and then the organizational meetings. Saturday began with Matins and Trisagion Prayers for those that have gone before us to eternal rest as it was Saturday of Souls. We especially remembered the newly-departed Sherry Abraham Morrow of Wichita, KS, who was so active with the Antiochian Women on the Diocesan and Archdiocesan levels. May her memory and the memory of all our loved ones be eternal! The organizations continued their meetings throughout the day on Saturday, breaking for lunch which was prepared by the faithful of St. Luke’s. After Great Vespers, attendees from all three groups went to a nearby restaurant to experience some local Cal-Mex cuisine. It was a great way to relax after a busy weekend of meetings and work. The weekend came to a conclusion on Sunday morning with the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy celebrated by His Grace Bishop JOHN, along with the clergy from St. Luke and Spiritual Advisors from the organizations.

Over 30 women from across the continent were present at the NAB Antiochian Women’s meeting. In addition to updates on the activities of the women in each of the seven Dioceses, reports were given on our current Project: “Hungry Children At Home and Abroad,” as well as our Humanitarian “Acts of Mercy” that includes

IOCC Emergency Relief kits. Our quarterly newsletter, *Diakonia*, continues to be published, and we are now on Facebook – “Antiochian Women North America” – Like us! The ladies of the Archdiocese are urged to welcome young women to join our organization; when our teens turn 18 years of age, each parish is encouraged to present them with an Antiochian Women’s pin. In this same vein, the young women of Teen SOYO who were in attendance at the Mid-Winter Meetings helped us to send cards to the widowed clergy wives to tell them that they are in our thoughts and prayers. Our meeting concluded with our Orthodox Book Club, led by His Grace Bishop JOHN, as we discussed “Royal Monastic: Princess Ileana of Romania [Mother Alexandra].” At Sunday’s Divine Liturgy, we celebrated the start of Antiochian Women’s Month with the distribution of the NAB’s “gift” to each woman in the Archdiocese – an icon/emergency information card – as well as the reading of the Epistle by the NAB President.

The officers of the Young Adult Ministry and former Fellowship of St. John the Divine met and updated each other on their diocese’s progress in the transition process of establishing the new Young Adult Ministry and Diocese Ministry Councils. They worked to develop a timeline for the next year as well as plan to help each diocese with the transition. With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, the new Archdiocese Young Adult Leadership Committee has been appointed. They are Jamil Malone, Chair; Wayne Parr, Vice-Chair; Jordan Kurzum, Service Coordinator; Kyra Pelachik, 2016 OYPC Co-Chair; and Fadi Madanat, 2016 OYPC Co-Chair.

We are very thankful to St. Luke Church in Garden Grove, CA, for hosting our meetings. We thank Fr. Michael Tassos and Anna Nasser for coordinating logistics for the weekend, and to the Antiochian Women of St. Luke for providing delicious desserts. We also thank Charmaine Darmour for helping to coordinate the meals, setup, and all the details to make the meetings run smoothly. Lastly, we thank our local planning committee for their help as well: Charlie Kassessey, Amal Michael, and Kyra Pelachik.

We look forward to the Summer Meetings at the Antiochian Village which will be held July 22-24, 2016.





## ST. EMMELIA ORTHODOX HOMESCHOOL CONFERENCE 2016



## THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF SACRED MUSIC

**T**he mission of the Department of Sacred Music is to guide chanters, choirs and congregations to musical excellence in worship for the glory of God. There are many ways in which we accomplish that mission: preserving the historical diversity of musical traditions in our churches, training young musicians and providing resources to new and mission parishes, building strong ties of communication throughout the Archdiocese, organizing workshops and seminars that improve the quality of musicianship, and publishing and distributing new and edited compositions in accordance with professional and liturgical standards.

Our most longstanding means of reaching parishes all over the diocese is the Sacred Music Institute, a community of like-minded musicians. A place where we can ask questions, experience challenges, and rediscover our passion for music can help us remember the reasons we were called to the vocation of church musicianship in the first place – and for those of us who were not called at all, but rather had the job thrust upon us, it can provide us with much-needed resources and support. We can connect with more experienced singers, identifying people who can help us and others whom we might be able to help. Most importantly, we take inspiration – spiritual,

mental, theological, and musical – from the diverse array of presenters who are there.

At the Sacred Music Institute, choir directors can receive training in their conducting skills, singers can work on vocal technique, chanters can learn notation – and all have the opportunity to observe and work with the most experienced and gifted musicians in the archdiocese. We discuss not only the importance of rehearsals, but also ideas for scheduling and administering them. Our Youth Music Ministry program, now in its fifth year, has shaped dozens of young singers and directors for a lifetime of service in the church. And in a very practical sense, every participant comes home with a wealth of new music.

When His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH issued a directive in March asking that every parish send at least one musician to the Sacred Music Institute, he showed his strong support of our ministry, as well as the rich musical tradition of our Archdiocese. With God's help, we hope to strengthen and elevate that tradition. We hope you will join us from July 13-17 at Antiochian Village. More information is available on our website, [antiochian.org/music](http://antiochian.org/music), or by contacting our chairman Paul Jabara, [sacredmusic@antiochian.org](mailto:sacredmusic@antiochian.org).

**S**everal years ago a few homeschool families met at Antiochian Village in western Pennsylvania for a Lenten retreat. Over the years, that small gathering has grown into a vibrant group of over 170 men, women, and children, from every part of North America and from all Orthodox backgrounds, who share the common thread of their Orthodox faith and homeschooling. These families meet at the Village each spring to pray together, learn more about homeschooling, and fellowship.

The St. Emmelia Homeschool Conference offers workshops for adults, teens, and children 3-years-old and up. Parents and professionals offer their expertise in areas that enrich all kinds of homeschool families, from beginners to veterans. Adult workshops covered everything from Homeschool 101: Getting Started to Reading the Classics to Your Children. The children spend their time playing and learning in their own age-appropriate workshops, with activities ranging from Byzantine chant and icon painting to movie night and scavenger hunts. These children have made lasting friendships with other homeschoolers from all over and enjoy spending time with other kids with whom they have so many things in common.

This year families traveled thousands of miles to participate in the 2016 St. Emmelia Homeschool Conference, presided over by His Grace Bishop THOMAS. Some flew from California or Texas and others made it a family road trip from as far away as Minnesota and North Carolina. A few even crossed over our northern border to join in the fun. It is certainly a testament to the fact that

Orthodox homeschool families around North America are eager to connect with each other, learn from each other, and pray with each other!

Each year the volunteer planning committee selects a theme and a keynote speaker. This year the Conference was blessed to have Father Noah Bushelli deliver the keynote address on homeschooling and the marriage relationship. Fr. Noah is the pastor of St. Philip Orthodox Church in Souderton, Pennsylvania. In addition to being a parish priest he is a homeschooling father and husband.

This Conference is made possible by the many parents who volunteer to organize and staff the events of the weekend. Hours of planning and preparation go into having a conference but the time is more than worth it.

In response to the growth in homeschooling families in our Archdiocese, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH has established a new Archdiocesan Department of Homeschooling under the episcopal oversight of Bishop THOMAS, directed by Fr. Noah. Beginning in 2017, the St. Emmelia Homeschool Conference will be blessed to be a part of this new department. This conference will continue to be a pan-Orthodox event and will welcome Orthodox homeschooling families from parishes all over North America.

The 2017 St. Emmelia Homeschool Conference will be held at the Antiochian Village April 27-30. Registration and other pertinent information will be available at [www.saintemmeliainconference.org](http://www.saintemmeliainconference.org) once details are finalized. Mark your calendar now and come and enjoy getting to know other Orthodox homeschooling families.

**The 2017 St. Emmelia Homeschool Conference will be held at the Antiochian Village April 27-30. Registration and other pertinent information will be available at [www.saintemmeliainconference.org](http://www.saintemmeliainconference.org) once details are finalized.**



# STRUGGLE FOR FAITH

Raphael (David) Beason



Above: Christian rapper Jahaziel as Natasha Crain. Photo credit: crossexamined.org  
Above right: The Four Horsemen of Atheism: Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and Christopher Hitchens

A big story among Christian youth at the start of this year was the de-conversion of Christian rapper Jahaziel. puts it, his “de- ment reads from the ‘2015 Why Christian- (Crain, 2016). Issues ranging from the crusades, books being left out of the canon, and the genocide of the Canaanites: these are things that church-goers will be beaten over the head with as our society becomes more and more anti-Christian, but can and have been answered. This story made me think about Lent a few years back, when I was at a particular parish and heard a visiting speaker address the topic of people leaving the Church. He said that one out of four youths would leave the Church at some point in their lives. These stats hit home with me because I was one of those youths.

It all started when I was about 19 years old and into my early 20’s; I struggled greatly with belief in God and religion. At one point in time, I considered myself a strong atheist, supporting groups like the Freedom from Religion Foundation and the Richard Dawkins Foundation. My faith began to erode away when I started having questions about the beliefs of the evangelical Pentecostal church in which I first began to live as a Christian. These questions would lead me down a rabbit hole and towards a wholesale rejection of Christianity and God, after diving into lectures by Bart Ehrman, and the “Four



Horsemen of Atheism” (Hitchens, Dawkins, Harris and Dennet). I would harden my stance and get more militant, reading and consuming every anti-religious thing I could, and spill it out over anyone who believed in God.

For anyone who spends much time online, it becomes clear that the internet has become a haven for atheism. At one point of time the “Infidels.org” was one of the most viewed sites online, with a great deal of counter-apologetics which I loved reading. Material by scholars such as Richard Carrier, who specialized in refuting the Resurrection, was, in my opinion, fantastic and I was completely sold by his chapter in *The Christian Delusion* that we should not buy the resurrection story. I would go on to read what could be coined as “the canon of new atheism,” as well as “Letter to a Christian Nation,” “The Case against the Case for Christ,” “Misquoting Jesus,” and watching almost every debate, video, and movie I could find on Youtube. I was a hardcore atheist with my own scarlet ‘A’ pin and Richard Dawkins’ shirt with his famous quote about the God of the Old Testament. A turning point in my life would take place while watching debates. I hated this philosopher named William Lane Craig, but he was good, and arguably won every debate he was involved in. He was developing a solid case for Christianity while undercutting these arguments I believed were so damning. He was my first real introduction to an intelligent Christian. Eventually I would find Gary Habermas and other apologists while I was attempting to refute William Lane Craig and would begin to struggle deeply with my non-belief. I watched as my idols crumbled before the truth of the cross. Here

were my heroes like Christopher Hitchens being refuted so handily, that “Common Sense” atheist blogger, Luke Muehlhauser, stated, “Frankly, Craig spanked Hitchens like a foolish child” (Muehlhauser, 2009) and I hated it.

The big blow was seeing Richard Carrier, a guy who is considered by many in the ‘infidel’ community to be a serious big hitter, get completely debunked and left almost speechless by William Lane Craig during the cross examining period of their 2009 Easter Debate, “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” So I started to read these Christian apologists, trying to grasp the subject on a deeper level. I would learn that Bart Ehrman had massively overstated his case, that Christopher Hitchens was all rhetoric, that Richard Dawkins was a horrible philosopher, and that “Christ Mythicists,” like Richard Carrier, are a

very small minority, one that the New Testament scholar R.J. Hoffmann compares to flat earth supporters (Hoffmann, 2012). As I dug deeper into examining both sides, I would watch as one of the most brilliant minds, a man who was considered the foremost philosophical atheist, Anthony Flew, struggled against an argument that Gary Habermas called the minimal facts approach to the Resurrection, and becoming a deist. Dr. Flew would go on to state, “I think that the Christian religion is the one religion that most clearly deserves to be honoured and respected whether or not its claim to be a divine revelation is true. There is nothing like the combination of a charismatic figure like Jesus and a first-class intellectual like St. Paul. If you’re wanting Omnipotence to set up a religion, this is the one to beat” (Flew, 2007). What I would grow to believe after much debate was that Christ was indeed risen from the dead and this was a difficult process with which I struggled deeply. This thirst for knowledge and this struggle would bring me into the Orthodox Church. This is where everything mental became reality, where I would experience Christ and communion with God by consuming His body and blood in the Eucharist- the

most life-changing moment of my life.

The first half of my story is common, and, if not taken seriously, it’s something that will continue to happen. I suggest that one part of the solution to this dilemma

is not to turn a blind eye to criticism of our Faith, but to engage the critics, or the young people grappling with these questions. For such young people, it’s critical to engage them early, before they are blindsided by a skeptic, without knowing how to respond. We have blogs like Father John Whiteford’s, in which he challenges you to “Stump the Priest.” We are not without a sword, and a refusal to pick one up to fight is simply inexcusable. My de-conversion and conversion story is nothing special, but the reality is that many of the reasons I left Christianity to begin with were completely avoidable, with some basic

exposure to Christian apologetics. For Orthodox Christians, this is part of who we are. It’s rooted in our history, from the Apostle Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill, Saint Justin Martyr’s *Apologies*, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons’ *Against Heresies*, to Saint John of Damascus’ *The Source of Knowledge*, and many more. We have dealt with hard questions, and with the grace of God, the Church has given truthful answers. If we wish to fight back the rising tides of secularization, of Islam, and the allure of foreign gods, we must take up this task again, even if it’s a simple class, a monthly book club, etc. Reading, praying, and arming the youth for withstanding attacks on their faith is the loving thing to do, and simply must be done. We should not allow ourselves to get so bruised and bloodied up by sophomoric attacks because we have no armor with which to protect ourselves. We have Christ, we have the Church, lead by the Holy Spirit. This task is more than manageable for us. America has many lost sheep seeking the truth, looking for answers and, most importantly, longing to be in communion with the living God. We have that in the On, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church.



Icon by Randa Al Khoury

**About the Author**  
Raphael Beason is a Member of Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church in Shreveport, Louisiana

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Economos Antony Gabriel

# REFLECTIONS ON THE PRIESTHOOD PART 1

TODAY, AS I  
WRITE THIS, IT  
IS COINCIDENTLY  
THE 50TH  
ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE REPOSE  
OF OUR LATE  
METROPOLITAN  
ANTONY.



By Economos Antony Gabriel

While it is a long time ago, for me the event is like yesterday. I remember kneeling before the altar as His Eminence was about to ordain me a deacon, and before he did, he whispered: “What name did you choose, since Kenneth is not a saint’s name?” I whispered back: “Elias,” the name of our parish. When he began the prayers of elevation, he loudly exclaimed “Antony” as he banged me on my head with his heavy hands. To this day, I believe he chose my name as a sign of friendship with my parents, remembering how often I sat on his lap when the car paraded to the fairgrounds for our annual St. Elias *Mahrajan*, with the late Archbishop

Samuel standing in the convertible, singing and chanting as loudly as possible, while Antony egged him on. Cars would stop on all sides of the road; of course, we had a police escort in those days, but people would stop in their tracks upon hearing that powerful voice.

I was fortunate to have a priest, +Fr. George Karim, who had the voice of — and was himself — an angel, alongside his Khouria Edna. Witnessing the two princes of the Church together in worship and at a Haflī, we never knew there was any strife between them. Personally, they loved each other, but partisans surrounding them created the problem that lasted until the union effectuated by Metropolitans PHILIP and MICHAEL, years later.

I will forever remember the tall, somber Metropolitan ANTONY, in his gruff voice, state, “Where there is a will, there is a way!” His stature filled the Royal Doors when he made this proclamation, hitting the *solea* with his gold staff. Even though I had prayed as a young man about the ministry, it was at that riveting moment that I was convinced as to the path on which I was about to embark for the rest of my life, and that there was no turning back.

Previously, we attended the Anglican Church, since there was no Church at the time with youth programs and Sunday School. The Anglicans tried their best to solicit me to study at an Anglican College with a full scholarship. Bishops Peabody of Boston and Lauriston Scaife of Buffalo tried every measure to entice me to change and become a full-fledged Anglican. I remember, however, another word His Eminence said: “He who has no past, has no present, nor any future.” Wow, I thought, can I deny my heritage? A resounding “No!” emanated from my heart.

I was ordained on that cold day in February in Paterson, New Jersey, where I interned with the late, great Economos Michael Simon. My mother and relatives brought an assortment of Arabic food and delicacies for the meal following the Liturgy. Quite frankly, the episode was a bit frightening; I was used to doing chores or driving His Eminence on trips, and he had never said a word! Then suddenly, Father Alexander Schmemmann called me to his office and said, “You will be ordained this Sunday,” as I quaked in my shoes. I had to run and call my mother-in-law, who was experienced in making vestments, to do a rush job for me in one week. Good Janna did so beautifully, and others too.

One of the most striking features of the Ordination Service, other than the prayers themselves, was the moment the Archbishop placed the lamb in our hands, saying: “Preserve this unblemished until your dying day, for the Lord shall require this of you on the Day of Judgment,” as we recited Psalm 50 behind the altar. I recall my mind swirling with the awesome responsibility that lay ahead. “Would I be worthy of this charge?” I was in a “Walter Mitty” state, with a multitude of thoughts swimming in my head.

Also, on that particular weekend, Mark, Nettie, Lynn, and myself stayed in a hotel, each in separate rooms, as we all participated in the Holy Mystery of Confession during Vespers, in a “kenotic” emptying of ourselves, in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the succeeding days.

We were really blessed to have Fathers Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff from St. Vladimir’s Seminary as our sponsors. We were so close to these won-

derful men of God. I used to babysit their children and have breakfast with them each morning. I was the youngest seminarian, and they took Lynn and myself under their wings, especially since Lynn was the first female to attend St. Vladimir’s Seminary. Professor Serge Verhovskoy was very partial to Lynn and stayed in touch with us until his repose, as we did with our sponsors. That will be another story!

As I stand back, lo, these many years, there are incidents that are embedded in our hearts and minds, especially from my time at St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary. We seminarians were blessed to have professors who, while sharing our humanity, were men and women of immense faith, compassion, and deep spirituality. They were trained in the classics, literature, mathematics, languages, the ancients, the Holy Fathers, Greek philosophy, Western modalities, and so forth. While there was something of the “old world” in their demeanors, styles, verbalization and values, they knew instinctively that they were placed by God on campuses at West 121st Street and Union Theological Seminary in New York City to inculcate in a new generation of students, in a new, Orthodox context, their real-life experiences from “another world.”

I was pushed through Syracuse University at a young age and therefore, upon entering this bastion of great Orthodox Christian knowledge, I was somewhat intimidated, wondering if I could survive with so many factors confronting someone so youthful. My first decision was to live with the students of what was then the “Russian Metropolia” (now the Orthodox Church in America) and students from Japan, India and Greece. One student ate raw garlic every day and the odor was so strong for our small chapel that, when the censuring took place as he was chanting, you would see a wall of odor in front of his face. A daily moment of levity, I suppose. My roommate was Fr. Thomas Hopko, who later became Dean of the seminary. At another time, I roomed with Father (later Bishop) ANTOUN (Khourī) until our landlady was murdered over Easter weekend. His Grace and I will never forget that late night when he returned from Philadelphia, where he was serving, and learned what had happened when we came back from Patterson, New Jersey.

The police explained the killers had her purse, so we retreated to New Jersey, leaving Fr. Antoun a note that our landlady was murdered. When we returned to class the next day, Fr. Antoun was sitting in the doorway, bug-eyed, with two knives in his hands, as he let out a few choice Arabic phrases (unsuitable for publication). “Why did you leave me that note?” he screamed! He had nowhere to go, as it was in the middle of the night. He sat



at the door to be on the ready, and most likely ready to throttle us for abandoning him. A tidbit in the history of the Seminary!

One day, my parents sent boxes of goodies for us all to share from their grapery store in Syracuse, New York. My wife, Lynn, decided she would prepare supper with those goodies for all the participants on that Saturday Vigil Service in fellowship with our classmates. Well, she prepared an excellent supper, turned out the light and went to chapel. After the lengthy service concluded, she very enthusiastically ran to the kitchen adjacent to the chapel and flipped on the light. To our horror, as the light illumined the large set table, cockroaches in the shape of the food ran off the table! Lynn and I ran downstairs to good old Dot, who had a small café where our simple fare was usually a roll and, if we were lucky, scraps of her turkey that she baked daily; or at least the turkey leg that we shared. These moments made life at the Seminary rather interesting, but did we ever miss our home cooking.

To return to our dear professors, which could take up a book, it was our privilege to take breakfast with the Schmemmanns, Meyendorffs and Verhovskoy's every morning. I cannot tell you in mere words the depth of what I learned in those encounters. My task was to babysit the children, which I gladly did. Masha Schmemman would giggle, calling me “icon eyes.” All the children were just beautiful. One could not help but embrace them, knowing that they had come to a new country and were exploring their new environment. Father John Meyendorff bought a car and we all ran outside to see his new acquisition. He began to bless his car using the prayer for a new home, “that it may never be moved from its foundation.” In retrospect, I don't know if that car ever did move! Of course, we all had to swallow our guffaws. Professor Veselin Kesich once heard me mumble in Greek. I was the fourth boy among a big gang in my home, so I learned to speak fast and indistinctly to have my voice heard. Well, that did not sit well with Prof. Kesich in the reciting of the New Testament Greek text, so, this saintly man came to my room every evening and inspired me to read slowly, articulating each word. I have followed that lesson to this day, am immensely grateful for it. After all, who would accept a garbled sermon? Thank you, Veselin.

It might be interesting to note that most of the faculty wives had to work in order to sustain the family; so meager were their salaries. I do not know what wages the professors received at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, France, but in New York City, survival depended on the support of their wives. Julianna Schmemman was luckier than most as a headmistress of a

prodigious school for girls. Mrs. Verhovskoy was a dress-maker for actors and actresses on Broadway. She had such artistry with her fingers, making something beautiful from nothing, even for her family. All of them had their own great stories that were embroidered in the fabric of their lives and struggles. They all made us feel that we were a part of something larger than ourselves. Indeed, the 1960s were full of expectation for Orthodox Christian unity, as we seemed to move together in exaltation and joy in and with one another.

It was so exciting! Men and women spoke with halting English, yet knew a new day was dawning. Vatican II confirmed that a revolution was taking place. In the classroom, we lived history though the anecdotes of Fr. Alexander, simultaneously humorous as well as poignant. We were uplifted as he turned our heads around from the symbolical nature of the Divine Liturgy and Mysteries (Sacraments) to their very reality. It was, consciously or unconsciously, Antiochian realism – the Mystery IS. No notes could fully teach us the apprehension of Divinity through contemplation of the Trinity and all the dogmas, of which today's heterodox believers have either little knowledge or which they consider disposable as not “politically correct.”

In our smorgasbord culture, Fr. John opened our eyes to the Palamite theology of the Divine Energies permeating the cosmos; every class was a simultaneous ascent and descent of grace. He once confided in me that I was the only one who understood the notion of *enhyppostasis* (Leontius of Byzantium). I was honored. Professor Nicholas Arseniev was a unique man who knew the most obscure languages and lectured with the Bible upside down as he recited a Pauline text. He was literally blind, yet, God took care of him crossing the streets. We were awestruck by his articulation of Eastern Mysticism (his book on the subject is a classic). Once, when reading to us in Greek the First Chapter of the Gospel of John – upside down – his voice became almost hollow and when we looked at him, he was off the floor, levitating. When Lynn took his course – he could see she was a woman – he scanned the class and exclaimed, “Please tell me what kind of being is ‘Eulinee.’” He read her signature on the attendance sheet upside down! Of course, she identified herself and he graciously welcomed the first female student to study at St. Vladimir Seminary. Lynn had warm relationships with Prof. Arseniev and Prof. Sergei Verhovskoy that lasted for years after we left.

One of the fondest memories that I must share is Professor Sergei Verhovskoy lecturing, with his eyes mostly closed, and with no notes. In between him saying, “Well,



well, you see,” my classmate, Fr. Thomas Hopko, and I envisioned him before the Holy Trinity contemplating Divinity. He once surmised that one could not be a good Christian unless one were a good human person. Once when asked if he believed there was life beyond this planet, he replied pensively, “Well, why not? God is greater than this universe. His creativity is not bound only to the earth.”

In my last year at seminary, I was granted permission to take a full load of the graduate courses that had been recently added to the curriculum. The main reason, besides my love of theology, was that in my second year I took ill with a rare blood disease called Boeck-Sarcoidosis, and I was compelled to leave school for surgery at the stem of my brain. Lynn offered to be with me as I left classes in the late fall. We had missed one another during the summer break, I was her main protector during our first year at St. Vladimir's Seminary and we forged a strong bond in humor, studies and loving to be in New York. On my trip home we decided to go to Canton, Ohio, which was her hometown. While there we decided we wanted to be married. We called the then-Father Philip Saliba (who later became our Metropolitan), pastor of St. George Church in Cleveland, and asked if he would marry us. Lynn loved Father Philip from her SOYO days, so off to Cleveland we went and we sort of eloped. When Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir) heard this, he called Fr. Philip and asked, “Are those two crazy kids with you?” He was none too happy, as he had other plans for his namesake-to-be. After our little ceremony we returned to Syracuse where I underwent surgery.

Even though the doctor who did the blood test in Canton told us not to marry, we thought we would conquer the world! I studied all summer at home and was ordained a deacon on the day of the annual *mahrajan* (picnic) by Metropolitan ANTONY. It was at that time he insisted on ordaining me with the name “Antony” after himself; an honor indeed. When I returned to Seminary, I lived from “pillar to post,” as we had lost our apartment after

our landlady had died. Lynn remained in Syracuse and I lived with various friends, including in an attic with mice.

One of my last oral exams for the graduate course in Dogmatics by Prof. Verhovskoy was on the New Testament. He asked, “What inanimate object in the Epistles of Paul was a reference to Christ?” He just threw in that question. I responded, “A rock.” He clapped his hands and replied, “Well, well, my dear, you have studied.” He was proud his youngest student was quick on the draw. We all loved him beyond measure for his innocence and his love of God. He did not write a “tome” with all the knowledge packed into his head – which he could have easily done – but his impact remains to this day.

All of our seminary professors made unique contributions to our priestly lives. No one can forget in those days the influence Fr. Alexander had on the “Metropolia,” as it was known back then (now the Orthodox Church in America) and at each Sobor. We were proud that he was the friend of the great Soviet critic Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Father John Meyendorff held a lecturing position at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. All of the professors had distinguished themselves in a variety of disciplines. We were in awe of the vast knowledge we gained at each lecture or even a casual conversation. Although we lived in close quarters and hot classrooms, and worshipped in a small, cramped chapel, our lives are much richer, our ministries are much deeper and our worship is more profound by the unique encounters with each and every professor who imparted their wit and wisdom to us. Their very presence among us greatly changed the landscape of Orthodoxy on this continent and abroad. We pray ceaselessly for their eternal memories.

As I look back on those days at St. Vladimir's Seminary, my mind frequently flows back to Bishop ANTOUN. Newly arrived from Brazil and accepted by Metropolitan ANTONY to study at the Seminary, he became fast friends with us; after all, living in New York for all of us was a new venture, and all we had was one another to hold on to.

The Slavic students were so much different in mentality, many coming from small Pennsylvania towns and reared according to the Russian traditions. We Antiochians had very different upbringings, with all of our Arabic traditions. For Deacon Antoun this was altogether an alien territory. He wore a top hat, with a very long black jacket, and sun glasses with a beard that made look like a Hasidic Jew. Basil Dallack and our small group took him to the Village for an Italian supper. Firstly, we were walking and he held my hand (as they do in Syria). I abruptly put it down and told him, not here! When we arrived



at the restaurant and we ordered spaghetti, he yelled: “Macaroni! That is all I ate for one week in Rome!” We thought this was going to be a treat!

After a short while, we shared an apartment together. I tried to teach him English, and he me, Arabic. He taught us Arabic in a class and I never got past “It is truly meet” in Arabic. One icy day, Antoun fell and broke his leg. We all took turns in taking care of him. He arrived with some funds that he generously shared with us, treating us to meals, we all felt like he was our brother and did whatever we could to make him comfortable. Midway through his Seminary days, Metropolitan ANTONY decided to ordain him a priest in Boston, where Antoun had relatives. Lynn took a collection and for \$45 we bought him his first vestment and drove Sayidna to Boston for the ordination. He later was assigned to Philadelphia so Father Joseph Shaheen could assume the pastorate in Indianapolis. He shunted back and forth between New York and Philadelphia until graduation. We occasionally went with him to his new parish to keep him company as he was initiated into an American milieu. On one such trip Metropolitan ANTONY was visiting the parish, and while censuring the Iconostasis in the small church of St. George, he saw that there was no icon to the patron saint. His Eminence exclaimed for all to hear, “For God’s sake, where is Saint George?” Of course there was muffled laughter in the church. Those were days of great intimacy.

When graduation came around, Mark Campbell and myself were awarded crosses quite ahead of schedule due to the fact both of us were straight-A students and never missed a class or had to do a makeup. Antoun was recognized for his assiduous note-taking with exact precision. This had helped him learn, not only theology, but English. He really struggled in his new environment. The late Metropolitan and Antoun were classmates at the Balamand and there is a classic story of the then-Priest Philip giving Antoun directions to come to Cleveland. They enjoyed a unique relationship. We all traveled back to Boston to bid farewell to the new Metropolitan ILYAS (Kurban) who had been elected to the Archdiocese of Tripoli. This was one of the most emotional moments for all of us. Father Tom Ruffin came from Worcester and it was a reunion of old friends, seeing their friend transformed from a parish priest to the Archpastor of a major Archdiocese in Lebanon at a tender age. It was one of the few occasions on which I witnessed Metropolitan ANTONY choke up during his speech. The “golden voice” was a favorite of Sayidna. The entire parish of St. George seemed to weep at his departure. Father Michael Abraham was the toastmaster and quoted freely from *The*

*Prophet* by Khalil Gibran, which added to the heightened emotions of the banquet.

To return to our graduation: I was not sure Lynn would be able to make the trip with our little son, David. I walked into the Common Room and there, to my surprise, was David, sitting on couch. Having Lynn and David completed the day for me. We later took the Faculty for supper at a Lebanese restaurant to express our gratitude for their care for us.

I was being assigned to my first parish in Phoenix, Arizona, and I knew that it would be some time before I would see them again. While packing the car to leave, I ran in for a final farewell and forgot to lock my car. It was ransacked by the time I returned, and all my clothes were gone!

We later returned to Syracuse to see my parents and the parish there organized a farewell lunch after church. In a few days we were off to Phoenix in the new car my parents purchased for the long trip. Little did we realize that we would need air conditioning in Phoenix. On the way we stopped to see Father Joe and Diane Shaheen. (Father Joe gave me my first little hand cross.) We also saw Father Gregory and Mary Jane Ofeish and other friends as we trekked across country to the so-called “Wild West.” Thus we began our first priestly adventure.

Today, Bishop ANTOUN and I are the last standing members of the Class of 1962 from St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York, close to Columbia University, Union Seminary and the Jewish Theological Seminary. What an intellectual environment!

Before moving on to our first parish, I need to take a little detour. When the Antiochian students first arrived in New York, Metropolitan ANTONY instructed us to go to St. Nicholas Cathedral and meet the venerable Father Wakim Dalack. He was married to Archpriest Basil Kherbawy’s daughter Alice. This was a kind of priestly royalty, in as much as Father Basil played a major role in the fledgling diocese, with St. Raphael, and later Aftimios Ofiesh his immediate successor. Also, Father Basil authored many books in Arabic and English on the history of the United States, and on the Orthodox Faith, among so many of his contributions. Father Dalack and Khouria Alice literally took us in and they loved Lynn. He was a successful business man before being ordained, and once told us to get a business first so you do not depend on others for a living. They gave many fine gifts to Lynn during this early period.

I must relate an event that made a deep impression. On one Holy Thursday we sauntered over to the Cathedral because the Metropolitan was serving. At the

conclusion of the service I went to the Altar to take a blessing from His Eminence. There was this six-foot-five Archbishop, having confession on his knees before Archimandrite Hannieh Kassab, who was no taller than four or five feet. Father Kassab was an eminent canon lawyer and one-time opponent of the Metropolitan during and after his election; and there was Sayidna kneeling before him as an altar boy in penance. Father Kassab had translated the ancient texts of the canons and lost them on the train, a precious work gone forever. I left the Holy Place with tears running down my face, seeing this giant of a man humbling himself in such a manner.

Later I was assigned to work with Economos Michael Simon, who in later years took courses at the Seminary. St. George of Paterson, New Jersey, was a renovated old building. This good priest had a voice that would break a chandelier. He and his wife Sarah were saintly to the core, welcoming and generous and deeply prayerful. This was the time that Boards of Trustees, as they were called then, ruled, and Abouna and Khouria had to raise a family on meagre means without one word of complaint. Until his retirement, at every Archdiocesan Convention if we were being transported by bus, he would stand up and sing making us all join in with his more than jovial gesture to make light of a tiresome trip. It was in Paterson that I met Van Mitchell, who worked at CBS with Pam Ilot. I used to stay at his home on the weekends that I went to Paterson. After some discussion it was decided that CBS would film portions of the Orthodox Holy Week on the Sunday program called, “Lamp unto my Feet.” This was a first. Sayidna presided, but Father Michael and his wonderful choir chanted portions of Holy Week with commentary by Van Mitchell. Later, at our urging, they filmed the Seminary’s Choir for the same program. Van used to say that, if you want a successful parish, make sure you have a good choir. He likened Father Simon to St. Peter for his great compassion for others in need.

On the Sundays we did not go to New Jersey, we would alternate between the Cathedral and St. Mary’s. The contrast was quite interesting. The James family took to Lynn, and mother Lodi would prepare a feast for us. The whole family lived in cramped quarters in Brooklyn. Those days it was quite different than today; everyone felt as though they belonged to an extended family. Father Paul and Shirley Schneirla, as mentioned earlier, extended their warm hospitality to us on the Sundays we worshipped there.

The same was the case in Paterson, where the Esahak family made us a part of their family. In the summer I spent time in New Kensington at the home of Father

Nicholas Ofeish (brother of Aftimios) and God only knows how much we learned from him and Khouria Emily; did they ever have stories. Father Nicholas once told me, “It is no good if everyone in the church loves you! If they do, it means you are good with the good and bad with the bad! You need only one face, and if you get a white spot on your black suit, everyone will notice, so keep yourself clean.” I spent one summer helping Father John Nicholas in Washington, D.C., and stayed with the Yazge family, Father Anthony’s parents Ray and Miriam. We were vagabonds during those days. Again, we were family. This was true whether we were going to Danbury, Connecticut, after a conference, or to Pearl and Bob Nahas’ after being made a sub-deacon at the Asbury Park Convention. (There the Liturgy was recorded for the first time, under the direction of Christine Lynch. Christine and Pearl are sisters, and nieces of Van Mitchell, whose father was a priest in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, years ago. They came by their love for the Church quite naturally.)

As part of the Seminary Choir, I went on various trips. One time, going to Montreal in the winter, we almost lost our lives, as the car slipped on black ice and off the highway. I was to preach at St. George, and Lynn went to St. Nicholas, never knowing that one day we would end up there. The purpose of the trips was to raise money for the Seminary, as well as awareness of theological education. Also, Metropolitan ANTONY often asked me to accompany him on pastoral visitations. Once we went to St. Nicholas in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where I was awarded a hundred-dollar scholarship. Of course, as soon as I received the check, the Archbishop zipped it out of my hands. (We received \$100 from him each month so he thought it belonged to him!) Well, when I returned to the Seminary I ordered a set of the Holy Fathers and sent him the bill. When he received this he called immediately and said, “Kenneth, why do I have this bill? To which I replied, that was my scholarship money you took. He retorted, “OK, you are the first one to beat me out of money!” Another time we traveled to Altoona, Pennsylvania. During a question-and-answer period in the hall, a man stood up and asked him how much money he had? The Archbishop requested he stand as he took out a black book and thumbed through it for a good fifteen minutes. Sayidna said, I don’t see your name as having contributed money to the Archdiocese! The red-faced gentleman retorted, “I give ideas.” To which the Metropolitan basically told him in Arabic: “I gave the world ideas, sit down and be quiet!” But it was a little different in Arabic.

His Eminence would call the Seminary and ask me and Father Joe Shaheen to come over immediately. I



would dress in a black suit. One time, he told Father Joe, “Show Kenneth how to change the storm windows.” He would ask window companies for a sample window, so each window was different at his Headquarters. He was saving money! By the time Father Joe and I completed this task, we were a mess. We were fed lentils and given rain coats he received from the local Fire Station. They were so long, we just gave them away. To my mind, Sayidna was like our Jiddos, who emigrated during a difficult period in the U.S. By calling so many companies to ask for samples, and by saving every penny in could in those days, he was preparing for the next generation. Once he was the overnight guest of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. At breakfast the President asked him (during an election year) how many people does he oversee in the Archdiocese. Sayidna replied with the global number in North America at that time. When Father Paul came to pick him up, the Metropolitan told him the story.

Father Paul replied: “Sayidna, we do not have that many in our Archdiocese!” His Eminence replied, “If he does not believe me, let him go and count them!” That was a typical expression of the Bashir sense of humor. Once on one of our trips, I queried him why he became a priest. He quickly replied, “At the Balamand I thought the clergy were bad; then I studied law and found them to be worse. So I made up my mind to be a servant of the Church, and give my life to the Lord. The best choice I ever made!”

It was during one of our trips that Sayidna informed me that I was being assigned upon graduation to Phoenix, Arizona. He depended upon me to bring this former Toledo parish under his Archdiocese. Also, as I was diagnosed with Boeck Sarcoid, a disease that would do better in a warmer climate, he was sending me there. I never knew how he learned of this rare blood disease, but he knew, as any good father would know. So, with these stories I will conclude this installment of my reflections on the priesthood. All these various experiences formed a mosaic of memories that has carried our generation through all challenges we faced in those early years.

*Fr. Antony is Chairman of the Antiochian Heritage Foundation and is recently retired from St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church of Montreal, Quebec, and McGill University. He is the author of several books, including The Ancient Church on New Shores, an authoritative history of the Antiochian Archdiocese from its founding to present day. (You can order a copy from the Antiochian Village Bookstore.) He has also authored many articles for The WORD magazine and other publications.*

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# Communities in Action

Bishop JOHN Visits  
St. Michael’s, Whittier

The visit of a bishop is very important in the life of a parish. This is not because of the personality of the man, or the fact that he holds a position of authority in the organizational structure of the church. Rather, bishops are successors of the Apostles. In other words, they are very much like “direct descendants” of the men who were specifically chosen and sent by Our Lord Jesus Christ to go forth in His Name. Furthermore, it is their faithfulness to the teachings of those first Apostles which assures the unity of the Church.

This was most certainly the case when Bishop JOHN, the Vicar Bishop for Western Rite Vicariate parishes, visited St. Michael’s Church in Whittier, California, March 11–13. His Grace met with all the clergy, the members of the Parish Council, the Antiochian Women of St. Michael, and the youth. His Grace also spent an entire morning with the Society of St. Benedict, a prayer society committed to the principles in the Rule of St Benedict.

His Grace also presided over several liturgical services and preached the homily on the Sunday before Lent, encouraging the faithful as they entered the Lenten journey. Following the Sunday Mass, a banquet in His Grace’s honor was held. Bishop JOHN joyfully answered many questions from parishioners and catechumens, and then spent several hours visiting with individual parishioners.

Our recently appointed parish Priest, V. Rev. John W. Fenton, presented His Grace with an em-



broidered icon made by one of the parishioners, and a signed copy of *Iron Blood*, by Her Serene Highness Eleonora Kantemir, Princess of Moldavia, who has been attending St. Michael’s.

The presence of the Bishop in the congregation – both during the liturgical services and even during meetings – brings to life the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in our midst. The loving care, continual

encouragement and self-sacrifice of His Grace both was evident to the parishioners, and has inspired them to remain constant in their faith and witness.

**St. Elias Cathedral Celebrates  
Anniversaries**

The Most Reverend Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America, blessed the clergy and



faithful of St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Ottawa by presiding over the celebrations of the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of the Cathedral, September 9 to 13, 2015.

This was the first visit of His Eminence to Ottawa after his election as the new Metropolitan. He arrived in Ottawa on Wednesday, September 9. The Very Rev. Fr. Ghattas Hajal, Pastor of the Cathedral, alongside Assistant Pastor Fr. Nektarios Najjar, the Parish Council, Mr. Sami Haddad (*Chargé d'affaires* of Lebanon), the representative of the Mayor, and the organizing committee of the event welcomed our Father in Christ Metropolitan JOSEPH at the airport's V.I.P. Salon.

Sayidna's visit started with a wel-



come dinner hosted by the Very Rev. Fr. Ghattas Hajal and Khouria Helene at their home, where His Eminence met Mr. Sami Haddad, *Chargé d'affaires* of Lebanon, the clergy, Parish Council, church organization officers and the organizing committee.

Mr. Haddad and his wife hosted a lunch on Thursday, September 10, at the Lebanese Embassy to welcome Metropolitan JOSEPH. Among the guests were the ambassadors of Algeria, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. This was an occasion to exchange

thoughts and perspectives on the situation in the Middle East and the Arab world, and served as a platform for inter-cultural dialogue.

His Eminence was hosted by Mr. Dimitri and Mrs. Susanne Zeidan on Thursday evening, and by Mrs. Joyce Tannis on Friday at noon. Mr. Zeidan served as the Parish Council President from 2009 to 2014, and is currently serving as a member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. Mrs. Tannis was the Chairwoman of the 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Organizing Committee, and played an essential role in the success of the occasion.

On Friday morning, Metropolitan JOSEPH met with the clergy of the Canadian deanery in the Cathedral's board room. Our priests came from Montreal to join their brothers in Ottawa and hear their father's

wise words and guidance.

One of the highlights of the week was the Great Banquet held on Friday night at St. Elias Centre in honour of His Eminence. The Banquet was well-attended, with almost 500 guests. Among them were His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York; His Excellency Bishop Paul-Marwan Tabet of the Maronite Church in Canada; Mr. Sami Haddad, *Chargé d'affaires* of Lebanon; His Worship Jim Watson, Mayor of Ottawa; Councillors of the City of

Ottawa; Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Purpura, Chairman of the Department of Youth and Parish Ministries in the Archdiocese; clergy of the Antiochian Orthodox Church and the Maronite and Melkite Catholic Churches; Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice-Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees; Mrs. Mary Winstanley O'Connor, member of the Board of Trustees; Mr. Roger David, North American Chair of the Order of St. Ignatius; and representatives of Lebanese associations and political parties.

Fr. Ghattas addressed His Eminence at the Banquet: "Like your patron saint, Joseph of Arimathea, who served the body of Christ by taking it down from the cross and burying it in a new tomb, you are now serving the body of Jesus Christ, which is His Church. Your many accomplishments for the last twenty-one years in this Archdiocese witness to your wise leadership and give us great hope for a bright future. We thank God for your Eminence and for the Holy Synod which elected you to be our Chief Shepherd."

His Eminence in turn addressed all present, and congratulated the faithful of St. Elias Parish on this remarkable milestone, the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish. He stressed that it is important to look forward and build a similar future in the coming 85 years of this church. Sayidna reminded the parishioners that God wants servants and dedicated people that give their minds and hearts to Him.

During the Banquet, His Eminence granted the Pastor of the Cathedral, The Very Reverend Fr. Ghattas Hajal, the Antonian Gold Medal of Merit. This is the highest honor given by our Archdiocese, "in recognition of distinguished services of exceptional merit, rendered with

generous and unselfish dedication." Fr. Hajal has led the parish for 23 years and continues to lead it with great love.

Several parishioners were presented by Fr. Ghattas and Khouria



Helene to receive Certificates of Meritorious Service from the Metropolitan for their dedication to St. Elias Cathedral: Sub-deacon George Saikali, Nader Hajjar, Grant Shacker, George Hanna, Charles Saikaley, Susanne Zeidan, Dr. Nawal Sarraf Sayegh, Joyce Tannis, and Faye Thomas.

On Saturday morning, Metropolitan JOSEPH blessed all the church organizations, and especially Sunday School students and teachers, by meeting with them in a fatherly encounter. His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER was also present. This was a chance to hear Sayidna's spiritual guidance and his vision for the Archdiocese, which he bases on the spiritual growth of the youth and the strong faith of the next generation.

Afterwards, all present had lunch with His Eminence and then accompanied him to the new St. Elias Cathedral Library, which he consecrated and blessed. His Eminence thanked Dr. Nawal Sarraf Sayegh for donating the library. Fr. Ghattas announced that the library will be opened to public use, for reading and research.

On Saturday Evening, His Eminence began the liturgical celebrations of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross by presiding over the feast's Great Vespers. At the end of the service, Sayidna spoke about the



This service was impressive for St. Elias parishioners, as this was the first time that it was done in this Cathedral.

His Eminence's powerful sermon reminded the faithful that each mo-

ment in our life we are in danger and at risk of sin. The Cross is our companion in these moments, and this is why we cross ourselves before and after each act we do in our daily lives. Metropolitan JOSEPH said that the Church is open to all believers to come and lay down their burdens and be healed. We as believers must not come to church as if we come to a social club, but as coming to seek first the kingdom of God.

Mr. George Hanna, Chairman of the Parish Council, hosted a dinner on Saturday night honouring Metropolitan JOSEPH. Bishop ALEXANDER, the clergy, Parish Council officers, the Organizing Committee and family members were all invited to a familial dinner and encounter with His Eminence.

We believe that the Divine Liturgy is the mirror of the heavenly kingdom. All the faithful sensed this on Sunday morning, the peak of the celebrations, when His Eminence presided over the Divine Liturgy celebrating the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. His Eminence was assisted by His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER, Very Rev. Fr. Ghattas Hajal, Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Purpura, Very Rev. Fr. Mitri Housan, Rev. Fr. Nektarios Najjar, and Sub-deacons Rassem El Massih, Robert Bayouk and George Saikali.

After the Gospel, Metropolitan JOSEPH granted Fr. Nektarios Najjar the *Epigonation*, which is a blessing enabling him to be a spiritual father and to hear confessions.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, all the faithful revered the Holy Cross as it was carried in procession for the Feast. Then Metropolitan JOSEPH inducted 23 new parishioners into the Order of Saint Ignatius. Three other members also became life-members: George Hanna, Joyce Tannis and Very Rev. Fr. Ghattas Hajal. Fr. Hajal was elevated to life-member by His Eminence on the request of the Parish Council.

Sunday's Luncheon offered another opportunity for the father to meet with his children, an extension of the communion with each other that is expressed in the Divine Liturgy. During this meal, His Eminence recognized the following former



parish council presidents and gave them tokens of appreciation: Charles Saikaley (1992–1997); Raymond Rizk (1997–1998); Gabi Nesralah (1998–2000); Andre Skaff (2001–2006); Sue Paruch (2007–2008); and Dimitri Zeidan (2009–2014).

Sayidna's final stop in Ottawa was at the house of a former Parish Council President and former member of the Board of Trustees, Charles Saikaley, who hosted His Eminence, the clergy and other Parish Council members and parishioners in a dinner on Sunday night. Those present said their goodbyes to Metropolitan JOSEPH and enjoyed beautiful Byzantine chants and oriental songs that gave the gathering a beautiful taste and sealed this visit with beautiful memories.

We at St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Ottawa thank our Lord Jesus Christ for 85 years of blessings and graces. We are so blessed to have a well-established, active and faithful Orthodox community. We also thank His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America, for his fatherly love and the numerous blessings that we received in his historic visit to Ottawa.

May God grant His Eminence many years as our Chief Shepherd and as our father in Christ. May He also grant all Antiochian Orthodox Churches in North America many years in faith and service for our Lord Jesus Christ and His flock.

#### Bishop ANTHONY Visits St. Luke in Chagrin Falls

His Grace Bishop ANTHONY visited the community of St. Luke the Evangelist in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, for the first time the weekend of December 12–13, 2015. His Grace's visit formally began with

his reception at the church by St. Luke's Pastor, the Rev. Fr. Matthew Thurman, and by the Very Rev. Fr. Andrew Harmon, Pastor of St. Matthew Church in North Royalton, Ohio. His Grace's reception was immediately followed by Saturday Vespers.

After Vespers, an all-parish dinner was held at the home of parishioner and Archdiocese Trustee Dr. George Thomas. The meal was hosted by his wife and parish Treasurer, Dr. Anne

Bourjaily Thomas. A lively discussion about a property and building for the parish's first permanent facility followed dinner. His Grace was updated by parish member Dr. John Dumot about the parish's six-acre property, past work on building plans, and possible future direction for building.

Bishop ANTHONY shared his experience and advice with the parish on proceeding with a building program. His Grace emphasized

that the parish was more than ready to conduct a capital campaign and embark upon a building project, and that the parish should build its church temple first. He also remarked that the parish needed to move into a larger interim space as a step towards building because it had outgrown its current space and needed room to expand so that the momentum in parish growth and towards the building could continue.

His Grace's visit continued on Sunday morning with Orthros and an Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. After Liturgy, the parish shared a potluck brunch organized by Parish Council member Dr. Mariam Stevens. Brunch was followed by a lively question-and-answer session with the church school students.

Bishop ANTHONY concluded his visit on Sunday evening by having dinner with the Parish Council. The dinner provided a final opportunity for Council members to discuss building plans with the Bishop.

#### St. Raphael of Brooklyn Church Receives Miraculous "Kursk Root" Icon

For several years, the various Orthodox Church communities of Eastern Iowa have gathered at each other's temples to celebrate Pan-Orthodox Vespers on each of the five Sunday evenings of Great Lent. On a recent Lenten Sunday evening, St. Raphael of Brooklyn Church in Iowa City, Iowa, hosted clergy and faithful from several parishes for a special evening. Seven priests, a deacon and many dozens of parishioners, representing at least eight parishes and five jurisdictions, anticipated the arrival of a very special guest. The wonderworking Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God, which is visiting churches in the



Midwest this Spring, was brought into our midst that evening.

The Kursk Root Icon was discovered by a hunter at the roots of a tree in the forest outside of Kursk, Russia, in 1295. It has been associated with many healings over the centuries, and even up to our own day. It was this icon which God used to heal a ten-year-old St. Seraphim of Sarov of a serious disease. This same icon was in the presence of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco when he reposed in the Lord. Enemies of God have tried to destroy the icon several times over the years, but to no avail. Since the middle of

the Twentieth Century, the icon has been kept in New York at the Russian Cathedral of the Mother of God of the Sign.

After a peaceful Vespers punctuated with the beautiful voices of the St. Raphael Church choir, all present had the opportunity to venerate this powerful expression of God's grace. Afterward, the clergy and faithful enjoyed each other's company and shared a delicious meal prepared by St. Raphael Church members.

Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, pray to your Son and our God for the salvation of our souls!

Photo credits: Fr. Dustin Lyon





# ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

2015 Judges Choice, Christopher Sola  
Diocese of Los Angeles

## Following St. Raphael on Education and Expansion

In reviewing the life of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, and his journey to and throughout North America, two things stood out to me. First, there is the importance that he saw in the availability of education for all interested members of the Church, in order to create a discerning congregation. Second, he placed great importance on the need to adapt how the Church teaches her beliefs – without altering Church doctrine – so as to ensure a continued Orthodox presence in the New World. These are matters that I found especially pressing at this time in my life, as I face uncertainty about my future, my high school career coming to an end, and I begin to consider both further education and the possibility of attending a seminary. These two foci, as presented by St. Raphael, were and are inextricably linked. As St. Raphael advocated, the education of all members of the Church is vital to a strong and continuing institution. I maintain that this applies both spiritually and secularly. The Church should do more as an entity to promote a well-rounded education of all its members, both to ensure a strong internal Church, as well as to ensure a warmer welcome for the Church in society.

As we hear in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (29:11), St. Raphael strove to allow growth of the Church in the “New World,” then referring to the Americas. As modern Orthodox Christians, we face a similar struggle for acceptance and growth. Our world is “new” in a different way – one that can be described as post-modern, even post-Christian. *Post-modernity*, as defined by the faculty of Georgetown University, is the rejection and questioning of a culture’s previously held beliefs and strictures as arbitrary and unnecessary. This includes a rejection of historical narratives, previous social values, and cultural traditions. In a world such as this, faith is increasingly set aside in favor

of the “scientific,” or what can be definitively proven. In many ways, the world we live in today reflects this post-modern thinking, and in such a world, religion is often regarded as unimportant, as it is seen to be holding truths that are impossible to prove. Indeed, we as a Church see no necessity to prove such things – we hold that the truth of God and Scripture is self-evident. In his reflections on ministry in a post-modern world, Bishop JOHN of Worcester simply states: “We know God as we know one another, and no one has yet to ask me if I exist.” For some reason in our “new world,” a world that demands evidence, this is not seen as enough. This demand for proof, then, drives away both potential converts and, tragically, pushes away the youth of the Church. While the Church need not, and should not, change herself to fit into this world, it is advisable that we engage this new, evidence-based line of thinking. This is the way the Church teaches its beliefs while acknowledging secular teaching.

While Church authority generally accepts secular education, failure to demonstrate changes in how the Church engages secular education – as complementary to one another – can result in confusion and the rejection of secular teachings by parishioners. I think many parishioners reject secular teachings, in part, because they don’t understand the Church’s stance on secular and moral issues. The result is a belief that the Church and science are irreconcilable. For St. Raphael, however, true science is merely the manner in which God’s actions can be interpreted. In a sermon delivered on December 17, 1895, he shows us his progressive thinking on the engagement of the Church with science: “Neither true science nor true faith has the ability to contradict one another.” His words describe the teachings of the Church and science as complementary understandings; when viewed correctly, they present interpretations of the same thing.

What impact, then, does this have on our classes in biology or anatomy and physiology? It has been long held that the literal interpretation of the Bible on origins, and the manner in which the Bible fits in with the understanding of the Earth’s history, as supported by science, is a matter of personal belief and did not need to be addressed by the Church herself. The rejection of secular education in favor of a literalist interpretation of the Bible, however, can be seen today to weaken the Church in two ways. First, respect for the Church, and therefore general acceptance from the outside world, is diminished and continues to decline exponentially. Second, the general assembly of the Church is made less discerning as a group, causing the Church to be more susceptible to falsehoods. With this in mind, if we follow St. Raphael’s emphasis on education, we will have more teachers in the Church who will engage her youth and guide them away from such falsehoods.

As stated earlier, in modern society, religious faith is generally held in lesser esteem than science; it could be said that science is, presently, the “language of the people.” St. Raphael advocated the use of English in services in the New World, so as not to alienate those who did not speak their ancestral languages as well as those who wished to convert. Similarly, the Church should engage scientific teachings in a public manner, so as to allow growth in a society increasingly dominated by secularism. By doing so, we make clear both to the outside world and to ourselves that we are not a stagnant institution. Failure to do so, coupled with the prevalence of literalist understandings held by Church members, will not limit Church expansion, but also cause the Church to be generally looked down upon by the predominantly post-modern world. While it is certainly not necessary that the world accept the Church for us to continue, this acceptance would make the world more welcoming to us, thereby ensuring continued growth and expansion of the Church. As the newly-departed Fr. Hopko advocated in his “55 Maxims of the Christian Life,” “Be an ordinary person, one of the human race,” and thereby make us more relatable and more welcomed. Likewise, continued rejection of secular education, especially in regard to the sciences, will internally weaken the Church; a congregation that is ignorant of the world in general is more likely to accept falsehoods as truth, in the same way a young child would be more likely to accept an improbability or impossibility that has been presented as truth. As the child grows, and becomes aware of the manner in which the world around him functions, he is then able to discern between what is true and what

is false. Ignorance makes the Church more susceptible to external attack on the Church’s teachings and allows heretical teachings to arise. As St. Raphael, himself, said, it is necessary that we be educated in the ways of the world, so that we know to “‘not believe every spirit’ but ‘to examine everything and hold onto what is good.’”

For St. Raphael, true science is merely the manner in which God’s actions can be interpreted. As Orthodox bioethicists John and Lyn Breck state in their book *Stages on Life’s Way*, “Scripture and Tradition will not give us pat answers ... [but] will provide us with perspective,” and likewise, “[Science] provides us with information and guidelines that will enable us to discern the will of God.” This thinking bridges the gap between science and religion without throwing away our witness to the world. The primary focus of the Church is and should be discerning the will of God; it is not necessary that we embrace secular teachings just for the sake of doing so. It is necessary, however, in the modern world that the Church adapt its methods of teaching so as to engage the world. We are called to bring God to the world and the world to God. This includes *science*. Science today is the new language of the people. In 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul reminds us that it is the Church’s duty to speak in the language of its people (vss. 15–19). We must meet this change in the world and, in so doing, help strengthen the Church in this new world, and help it to grow, as our Father among the saints, St. Raphael of Brooklyn, worked to do a century ago. Let us honor his legacy by continuing his work.

Christopher Sola, 17  
St. George, Phoenix, Arizona







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As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.  
- Joshua 24:15 -






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## 2016 Diocesan Parish Life Conferences

**Diocese of Charleston/New York**  
St. Mary Church, Johnstown, PA &  
St. Michael Church, Greensburg, PA  
(to be held at the Antiochian Village)

June 29-July 3, 2016

**Diocese of Los Angeles/Eagle River**  
St. George Church, Phoenix, AZ  
June 29-July 3, 2016


**Diocese of Miami**  
St. Andrew Church, Pensacola, FL  
June 15-18, 2016

**Diocese of Ottawa**  
St. George Church, New Hartford, NY  
June 30-July 3, 2016

**Diocese of Toledo**  
Basilica of St. Mary, Livonia, MI  
June 22-26, 2016

**Diocese of Wichita**  
St. Anthony Church, Tulsa, OK  
June 15-18, 2016

**Diocese of Worcester**  
St. George Church, Lawrence, MA  
June 11 and 25-26, 2016



**Diocese of Worcester Parish Life Conference & Pre-Conference**  
Hosted by St. George Orthodox Church, Lawrence, Mass.  
June 11 and 25, 2016

**Schedule of Events**

**PRE-CONFERENCE: Saturday, June 11, 2016**  
**LOCATION: St. George Orthodox Church, 8 Lowell Street, Lawrence, MA**


8:30 AM	Registration
9:00-10:00	Creative Arts Festival Judging
10:15- 12:00	Oratorical Festival
12:00- 1:30	Luncheon (hosted by St. George Parishioners)
2:00- 4:00	Organizational Meetings

**CONFERENCE: Saturday, June 25, 2016**  
**LOCATION: Sts. Constantine and Helen Church, 71 Chandler Road, Andover, MA**


9:00 AM	Registration
10:00-11:30	Divine Liturgy
11:30-1:00	Awards Lunch
1:15-2:00	Keynote Address ("As for me and my house, we will follow the Lord") <i>Dr. James C. Skedros, Dean of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology</i>
2:00- 3:00	Workshops on Conference Theme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marriage Under Stress</li> <li>Orthodox Family in a Post Christian World</li> <li>Responsibility to Parish, Diocese, Town and World</li> <li>Teen Group</li> <li>Youth Activity</li> </ul>
3:00- 5:00	Bible Bowl
5:15- 6:00	Vespers
6:00- 9:00	Family Dinner and Dance

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Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America -- North American Board  
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