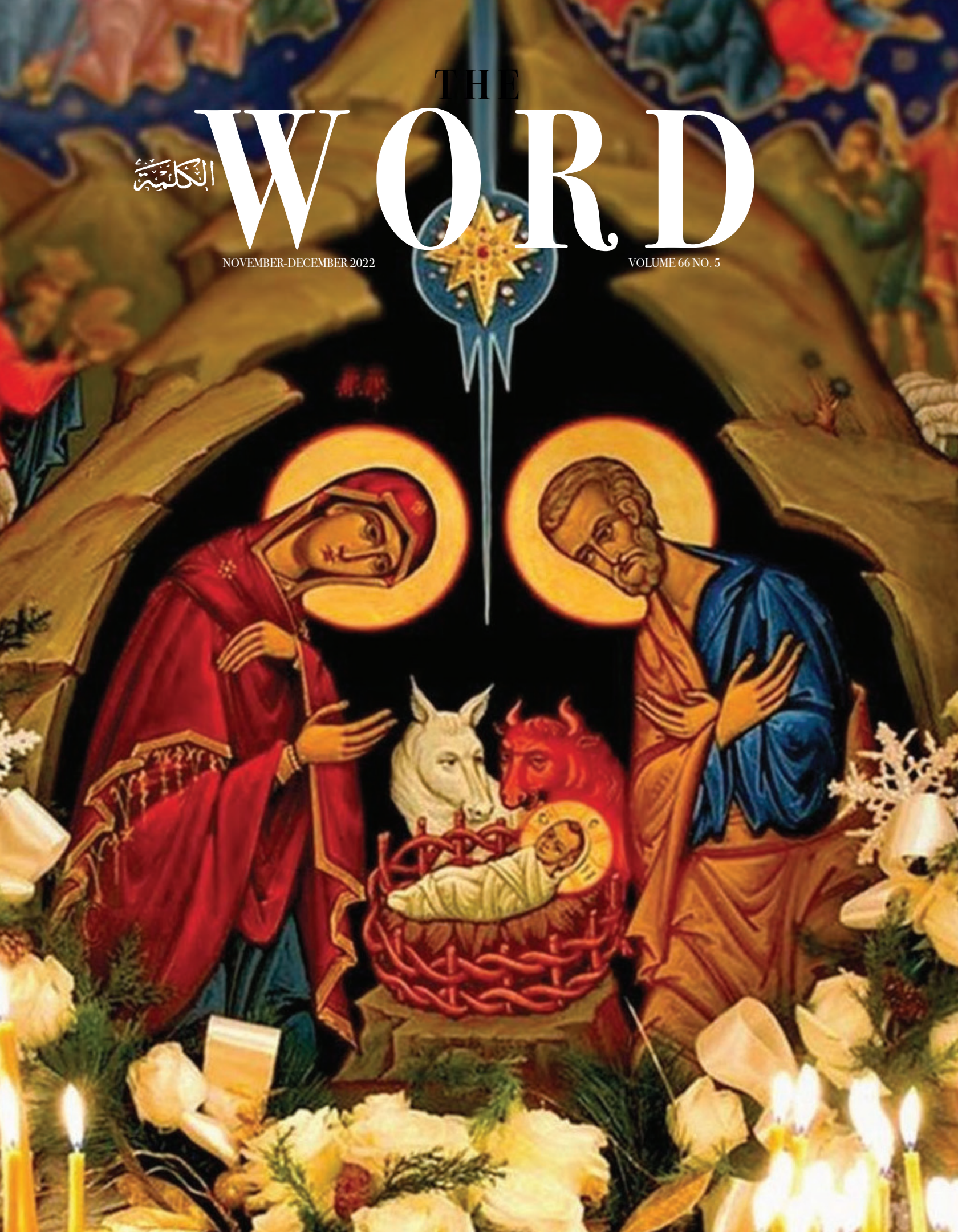


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THE WORD

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2022

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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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GOD IS WITH US

Bishop JOHN

Habits and routines save us time, and allow us to function without thinking about all the little things that need to be accomplished before we can leave the house and start our day. These habits bring us a sense of security. They let us to put our attention on the complex things that we deal with. We people like routine, and good habits give us the sense that everything is as it should be.

Sociologists tell college students that the world has changed more in their lifetime than in all the centuries before it. If we add to that quickly changing world a pandemic, and changes in our church administration, we could expect some level of insecurity, anger, defensiveness, and unsettledness. The last place that we want or expect change is in our Orthodox Church, where we claim a consistent witness to the unchanging Lord. The truth is that we need to change all the time in order to maintain our consistent witness to the truth of God's revelation.

With the requested retirement of Metropolitan JOSEPH, many of us are overwhelmed with feelings. These feelings are rooted in our long personal relationships with Metropolitan JOSEPH, both positive and negative, as well as the feelings that come with any change. Even positive change comes with losses from the old routines and habits. These losses, like all losses, need to be grieved, and we may find ourselves passing through one or another of the well-known grief-reactions: anger, shock, bargaining and depression. The fact that we are Christians does not exempt us from feeling. We should recognize these feelings as understandable, and even normal.

We Christians are people with emotions; we Christians are also the people of the Resurrection. We are baptized into Christ, and Christ shares our

lives even as we share His. When we face uncertainty, we face it knowing that *God is with us*. We are not alone. God is with us, loving us and leading us through the valley of uncertainty to a place of peace.

During this time of uncertainty, I was blessed to celebrate an ordination this week. A man and his family gave themselves to God. In turn, the Church received him and gave him to a church community to help renew and lead. The whole Archdiocese is born anew with every ordination because the whole Archdiocese needs to change routines and habits to make room for this new voice of witness and life. Likewise, we must remind ourselves that the Church is larger than all of us as individuals. Church history is full of examples of strife and difficult times, but the Church survives them because it was established by Christ and is the ark of salvation. It doesn't rise or fall because of any individual cleric or layperson.

When I was young, my grandmother would cry out "na'eeman" (rebirth) – "امّي عن" when we emerged from the shower. This is the same cry that people would make when a baby was lifted out of the baptismal font. Within our daily lives we have reminders that God is with us in all that we do.

Patriarch JOHN X and the Holy Synod of Antioch have been in constant contact with us, offering encouragement and reassuring us of their care. We are truly grateful for this and trust that God, through them, will provide us with the leadership we need during the nomination and election process for a new metropolitan. As details of the constitutional process become available, we will keep the faithful informed.

*God is with us, understand all nations,
that God is with us.*

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

SAINT TIKHON'S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MAY 27-28, 2022

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The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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I am humbled once again to be invited to address you on this important step in your life, and in service to the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Today, as many of you are preparing for parish assignments – and all of us being called to serve Christ in His Church in various ways – I would like to offer you some very important advice regarding the proper focus for all of us in the Church, and especially the clergy. It is expressed succinctly in Psalm 25:8: *“O Lord, I love the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth.”* Cassiodorus, from the early Sixth Century, writes, “The beauty of thy house means not splendor of walls or most expensive tableware, but the most blessed nature of those actions in which the whole Church rejoices: namely, the glad rendering of psalms, the piety of prayers, the most humble devotion of the Christian people” (*Exposition of the Psalms*).

“O Lord, I love the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth.”

In our society, and sadly all too often within the Church, it is not uncommon to meet clergy who consider their priesthood to be their *job*. They put in their office hours, make a few visits, and serve the service on the weekend, but other than that they occupy themselves with the cares and pursuits of the world in the same way as many of the laity. Likewise, it is not uncommon to encounter parish councils that consider their priest to be their *employee*, someone who is there to provide them with religious goods and services in exchange for a paycheck. What is missing from both is love for the beauty of God's house, a heart that is aflame with the love of God and which draws them, day after day, in prayer to the Holy Altar. This is the most important table in the priest's life – a table of loving encounter with the living God. Prior to the enthronement of His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, some years ago, we had a priest in the Antiochian Archdiocese who was very fond of cats. This priest lived in the church rectory, and he had an incredible number of cats. The parish council complained to His Eminence that there were too many cats in the rectory, and that they were doing considerable damage to the house. His Eminence, God bless his soul, told him that he needed to cut back, and that he needed to decide between his parish and parishioners on the one hand, and the cats on the other hand. To the best of my knowledge, to this day, we have never heard about that priest or his cats again, because he chose his cats over the parish. So, my first piece of advice is not to choose your cats over the Holy Altar!

Cats aside, all of us as Christians, clergy and laity alike, become distracted by the cares and concerns of this life, which draw our attention and affection away from Christ and His Church and to other things. Even those things that are not bad in and of themselves can become a distraction from the love of God and devotion to the Holy Altar. The way in which we love our family, our home, our recreational and relaxation activities, our continuing education, our neighborhoods and cities, will either deepen or diminish the dedication of our lives to a loving union with God and service to Him. In fact, it is even possible to go about our lives as clergy with the motivation of self-love – building up our careers and our reputations – even as we are praying the Divine Services. We should not forget the words of our Lord who

said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

St. John of Kronstadt, in his *Counsels on the Christian Priesthood*, writes, “Fight against every worldly enticement, against every material enticement, that hinders you from fulfilling Christ’s commandments. Love God with all your heart, and care with all your strength for the salvation both of your own soul and of the souls of others: be a lover of souls Besides looking upon corruptible creatures and created things, turn your eyes constantly upon the Creator, who is in everything that he has created, and constantly looks upon you, constantly proves your heart and your thoughts. Do not cling with all your heart to anything or anybody else, and do not make anything or anybody else your heart’s god: the sole god of the heart must be the Lord God himself, and to him only must we cleave.”

In his Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul calls us

went into their church, and went to their altar every day, and prayed for the parishioners and their situations for no less than an hour. Included in this time was reviewing the liturgical services he would serve next, and making sure his altar, his sanctuary, and the church edifice were not only in good structural shape, but clean. He also used this time each day to make sure the liturgical colors that adorned the church were in keeping with the season.

Why would Fr. Michael make this such an important recommendation for every priest he mentored? He did so because the life of the priest – notice I said *life* and not *job* – is one of love for Christ and His Church! It is a life of love of the sacraments and services. It is a life of love for his spiritual children, whom he upholds in prayer. This life of love is anchored to the Holy Altar at which we are blessed to serve.

“O Lord, I love the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth.”



to fix our attention and affection on those things that are related to the eternal Kingdom of God. He writes, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (3:1–4).

When I was growing up, my uncle, Fr. Michael Simon, was not only my priest, but for many years the only priest the seminarians trained under while they were at St. Vladimir’s. One of the things he strongly urged priests to do was to make sure they

St. John of Kronstadt again writes, “With the love of a mother – rather, with the love of God – the Church bears us up in her arms very day, never ceasing to lift up her prayers to the Lord for us all, in the evening, at night, in the morning, and in the middle of the day. She teaches us, cleanses us, heals us, hallows and strengthens us, guides us in the path of salvation and of life eternal. Blessed are those priests who understand this love, who understand this care of the Church for the salvation of her children, and who try to make their own this spirit of the caring Church, who try to live by it, to breathe by it, inside and outside the church; blessed are those who therefore offer prayers and praises, and celebrate the

divine services of the Church, with real attention and devotion, mindful that through this they will save both themselves and their flock!" (*Counsels on the Christian Priesthood*).

Of those of us who are blessed to serve the Church as clergy, and indeed, of all Christians who are members of the Royal Priesthood of God, as St. Peter writes, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We are called to have our lives anchored to the Holy Altar and the most immaculate and precious Body and Blood of our Lord, and God, and Savior, Jesus Christ. With hearts aflame with the love of God, we live as it were in a cycle of coming and going from the Holy Altar. With prayer and praise, the Sacraments and services, in fellowship with Christ and His Church, we are drawn to these precious and life-giving times of standing before the Holy Altar, surrounded by the Saints (both Militant and Triumphant), and joining our hearts and our voices with the perpetual worship around the heavenly throne, before we are sent out again. Where else would we want to be? Where else is there life everlasting? Where else is there love, joy, and peace unending? This is our life! This is love!

"O Lord, I love the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth."

"O Lord, let your priests be clothed with righteousness; let them always remember the greatness of their calling; let them not be entangled in the snares of the world and the devil; let them be saved from the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things entering into their hearts." Set their hearts aflame with love for the beauty of Your house, that zealously returning again and again to Your Holy Altar, they may serve You faithfully all the days of their lives, for the salvation Your people and the glory of Your Holy Name, of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

COVARRUBIAS, Deacon Jason, to the holy priesthood on August 15, 2022, at St. Andrew Church, Riverside, California. Fr. Jason is assigned to that parish.

FINE, Deacon Nicholas, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on September 25, 2022, at St. Nicholas Church, Bridgeport, Connecticut. Fr. Nicholas will be assigned to St. Anthony Church, Bergenfield, New Jersey, after completing seminary.

HASTINGS, Deacon Ephraim, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on September 1, 2022, at St. George Church, Lawrence, Massachusetts. He is assigned there as pastor.

HUELSMAN, Subdeacon Nectarios (Nicholas), to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on September 7, 2022, at St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is serving at Holy Cross Church, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

MAKARIOS, Deacon Mark, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on October 2, 2022, at St. George Church, Houston, Texas. He is assigned as second priest of that parish.

NASRALLAH, Deacon Nicholas, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on August 14, 2022, at St. Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, California.

ELEVATIONS

HACKNEY, Fr. Daniel, was elevated to the rank and dignity of archpriest by Bishop ANTHONY on October 2, 2022. The V. Rev. Fr. Daniel is pastor of St. Ananias, Evansville, Indiana.

THURMAN, Fr. Matthew, to the rank and dignity of archpriest by Bishop ANTHONY on September 25, 2022. The V. Rev. Fr. Matthew is pastor of St. Luke, Bainbridge, Ohio.



LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR ORTHODOX SCHOOLS

Basil (Kevin) Stuart

First, some background is needed. Usually, when the topic of starting a local parish school is brought up, the numerous pitfalls inherent in doing so quickly begin to emerge in a flood of questions. How can the church afford to take on such a cost? If the cost is borne alone by the families who send their kids there, wouldn't it become too expensive? How can we make our school affordable to our parish families so that it is actually fulfilling its intended purpose of helping to raise up our children to love and serve God? How do we attract quality teachers without the means to pay them a salary commensurate with their training and expertise? Won't we just have to hire untrained young people to teach our kids, and if we do that, then are our children truly getting the quality liberal arts education? If we

hire untrained young adults to be teachers because they are more affordable, won't they just leave once they decide to get married, have children, and try to grow their families, out of the simple need to search for better pay so that they can provide for their families? If we charge high enough tuition fees to pay the teachers a livable wage, then won't we be undermining the entire purpose of the Orthodox school, because most of our local children won't be able to attend on account of the high cost and impact on their family's finances? At some point won't the cost burden of this school simply become too much of a burden on our local parish, and we be forced to consider closing it? If we can find committed individuals to come and serve in this school as a mission for the sake of Christ, what will happen when they finally do have to move on? If we reach out to non-Orthodox families wealthy enough to pay the high tuitions, won't we have to offer the things that would be attractive to their children such as quality sports teams which would then drain the finances of the school, and force us to look for quality coaches first, and talented teachers second; wouldn't that also act to undermine our intended purpose of helping to raise up godly children to love and serve God by diverting much needed funding towards the fun and the frivolous? Also, if we cater to the whims of local non-Orthodox wealthy families, won't we run the risk of going the way of now famous and largely secular institutions like Harvard and Princeton, that were once schools focused on training up the young for ministry, but over time sold out to the interests of the wealthy in order to stay afloat? How do we set up and structure our schools so that the schools that we start today remain viable institutions continuously devoted to their mission of helping our children to know, love, and serve the Lord; to be Christ to those around them?

These, and so many more daunting questions, are the cares and concerns that so consistently choke out the message we are hearing of the need to start more Orthodox schools, but there is a remedy, and thankfully, that remedy is hinted at in the Scriptures.

Schools are expensive! Once commenced, they represent a huge cost, in time, dedication, and finances, for the churches and missions that start them. If not handled well, they can become the hangman's noose around the vitality of the church.

Yet the remedy was given by God, thousands of years ago, when He gave Pharaoh a dream and revealed to His servant Joseph the interpretation for it. In Genesis 40 and 41, God Himself laid out the way that we should begin to start more Orthodox Christian schools. Granted, He made no mention of schools in those passages, but he did show us how to prepare for something that will cost us greatly: He shows us how to set aside what we have for the future costs of what is coming.

In a way, he also hinted to us what will likely happen if we do not store up from what we have for the future costs we shall face. In the parable of the man who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24–28), contrasted with the man who built his house upon the rock, we learn of the dangers of rushing into things out of zeal and a lack of foresight. Since we know that schools are expensive complete with many hidden costs, it would be wise to follow the example that God gave to Pharaoh, and though many of you may be nodding your heads in agreement, you're likely still asking yourselves just how, specifically?

Before we start the process of creating our Orthodox schools, we must first build the foundation, a financial foundation, or more specifically, an Education Foundation; and, it is important that this Education Foundation be a separate entity from the school in order to help insulate it from potential lawsuits which may be targeted at the school. Regardless of the reasons for these potential lawsuits, it is smart to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, by taking all necessary measures to ensure that all of your hard work and selfless labors to invest in the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, are not eaten up by various legal and financial attacks from whichever direction they may come. These thoughtful measures will also help to give potential givers more confidence in your respective Education Foundation. Here at Saints Joachim and Anna, we have chosen to name ours, the St. Raphael Education Foundation, and we are nearly done finalizing our articles of incorporation which we will then submit to the State of Washington. (It seems the articles of incorporation should also be submitted to the Archdiocese.)

Once your local church or mission has chosen to start an Education Foundation, you will need to make sure that it is set up to support not just a church school, but also all areas of Orthodox

Christian Education. In the event of a lawsuit against the school, the court will be less inclined to allow the Education Foundation to be included in the lawsuit, since the scope of its giving is well beyond just that of the school, and does not mention the school specifically, but rather Orthodox education and related work.

Nevertheless, the Education Foundation would have two primary goals, one short term, and one long term. The short-term goal would be to fund-raise on a yearly or other-

wise cyclical basis for the purpose of offering financial grants in support of Orthodox education, to any Orthodox Christian or family in your

geographic area who applies for those grants. This could in-

clude anything from paying the costs of the seminary training of interested seminarians, to the costs of families choosing to home-school their children, to those that are interested in a co-op approach to the educational needs of their children, to individual Orthodox teachers who may apply for grant money to supplement what they are doing in their classrooms in the local Orthodox school, and so forth. The

key to this component, however, is its short-term nature in meeting the needs of local Orthodox Christians.

The second component of the Education Foundation would be to raise enough money to open and invest in an endowment with a regional non-profit investment entity (such as the Oregon Community Foundation, or the Gorge Foundation here in Oregon, or the Community Foundation

for Southwest Washington). The job of such an entity would be to manage the invested money, handle the paperwork and the communication inherent with such an investment, and distribute the earned dividends to your local Education Foundation. This all sounds dry and boring, but this is the best part! These dividends will be a major source of funding, the financial foundation, for the local Orthodox school! In fact, I would like to advocate that a new teacher not be hired at your local Or-

thodox school until enough money

has been raised, and the endowment has grown sufficiently to

pay for half of the teacher's

yearly salary, plus her

or his healthcare and

retirement. If the

teacher is offered

\$40,000 per year,

and half of that is coming

from the endowment (passive income from

the investments) then

the school only has

to generate the

other \$20,000,

which can be easily

taken care of by

charging a nominal

tuition which is much

more affordable to the

many families of the

church. Imagine being able

to hire high-quality teachers,

who may even have their master's

degrees in education, to come and

teach at your local Orthodox Christian

School! If that prospective teacher

has 20 students and each of them

only represents \$100 per month in

tuition, then at ten months (a typical

school year) you would have the

\$20,000 needed to pay that teacher.

Granted, the tuition would likely have to be a bit higher than \$100 per month in order to cover other operating costs, but this gives you a good idea of the possibilities.

A husband and wife may budget together, and in doing so, come to an agreement on their finances, arriving at a shared vision, and shared goals, and by extension see greater harmony in

their lives and marriage. Similarly, churches and missions that wish to start Orthodox schools and are willing to go through this process outlined in this article, can patiently work toward their goal of having a stable, viable, liberal arts Orthodox education. It will be a long-term option for the families of their church and the Orthodox families in the surrounding area. With a foundation like this, the odds of the school enduring for generations to come and maintaining its original mission of raising up our young people for the love and service of our Lord, are greatly increased!

Even better, because these non-profit investment organizations which would be your **Education Foundation's** endowment are also managing the funds from hundreds of other smaller foundations, they are an almost endless source of grant funds for your school as well. This allows your local Orthodox school to seek grant funds from a much wider group of sources. Why not use the money of those with other aims to further the Kingdom of our Lord, Jesus? Wouldn't using these outside grant sources to help the local Orthodox school move forward on its mission, be a wise way to invest the talents our Lord has given us?

You may still be wondering when to start the process of making the actual school. If you are considering what I have outlined here, then the right time to begin the process of creating the school would be when your endowment is getting close to being able to pay your first teacher (or perhaps, administrator) half of the salary you intend to offer him or her. Only then can you move forward in confidence, because only then will you be building on a stable foundation against which the floods of hidden costs cannot easily prevail. Perhaps you are wondering, won't that take a long time? It may, or more likely, it will take only as long as it takes your church and **Education Foundation** to get it accomplished, which is to say, that if you work hard, and keep it before the Lord in prayer, then it will happen faster, and your local church and **Education Foundation** Board will likely grow in unity and harmony because of your shared vision and

goals. If you don't, then it may be a while, but at least you will be able to avoid the usual stresses in your local church that are brought about by the added financial and labor strains which so frequently come with having a school.

We do not need poorly funded Orthodox schools with a high likelihood of closure or failure. We do need well-financed Orthodox schools with a high probability of enduring, low teacher turnover, and the stability provided by trained teachers who are also passionate about their faith, a liberal arts education, and their joy of teaching. So then, let us move forward in the example our Lord gave us in Pharaoh's dream, and begin to set aside what we have for the foundation on which to build Orthodox schools that will help us fulfill the mission of raising up faithful, thoughtful, and godly young people.

Basil (Kevin) Stuart, Reader
Reader Basil is a ten-year veteran public school teacher, grades 7-12, with experience both in the "bush" part of Alaska, as well as in Oregon (for five years each). He has a Masters in Education from Vanguard University in which his focus was Curriculum Design and Instruction. Before this he taught in a private Christian school in Southern California.



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 - St. Theophan

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EDUCATION IN PURSUIT OF VIRTUE, WISDOM, AND JOY

A REVIEW OF

The Ancient Church on New Shores

V. Rev. Timothy Ferguson

Anyone interested in the development of Antiochian Orthodoxy in North America will welcome Fr. Antony Gabrials' book, *The Ancient Church on New Shores*. While aspects of our history have appeared in periodicals and scholarly journals as well as in papers submitted as graduate degree requirements, this is the first historical account offered for general readership.

This wonderfully written chronicle of the Antiochian experience on this continent is not a sanitized apologetic, extolling the glories of yesteryear. Instead, it is an unabashed survey of the breadth and depth of Orthodox ecclesial history in twentieth-century America, as it relates to Antiochians and their struggle to emerge as one united Archdiocese. The writer offers a coherent Antiochian narrative that deserves a wide readership.

This book outlines three distinct epochs of Antiochian history in America, each corresponding to the tenure of the most prominent hierarchs; the missionary and development phase under Bishop RAPHAEL Hawaweeny; the stage of identity and organization under Metropolitan ANTONY Bashir; and the era of maturity, unity, expansion and independence of Metropolitan PHILIP Saliba.

Here the reader will encounter an Archdiocese shaped, in large part, by the push and pull of the ecclesiastical, secular and political influences of the Twentieth Century. The author introduces us to the saints and heroes, the renegades and the recalcitrant, who directly or indirectly lent shape to this Archdiocese. The "old world" intrigues and allegiances spawned in the wake of Bishop Raphael's death,



the Russian-Antiochian conflict, and the New York-Toledo schism are thoroughly covered and documented, offering revealing insight into the inner workings of the institutional church. The documentation, which is fully one half of the book, should be greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, there is no index so the reader should have pencil in hand to highlight specific individuals and events.

Of particular interest is the often-incendiary role of the Arabic press, both here and abroad, vying for political influence reflective of cold-war, East-vs.-West posturing. It should come as no surprise that some unscrupulous hierarchs, pursuing a course of self-aggrandizement and shrouded in the ceremonial and liturgical apparatus of their office, traded right and left with the religious and secular powers-that-be in order to exert unwarranted influence over the church in North America.

The fervent struggle of our Antiochian pioneers to establish our Archdiocese is a legacy each of us should honor and hold dear. A keen awareness of this history contributes to a deeper sense of Antiochian identity. This legacy cannot be inherited; it must be taught and embraced by each succeeding generation. Fr. Antony's work should be required reading for every seminarian as well as any priest who does not come from a traditionally Antiochian community. It identifies us with a self-confident and mature church steeped in her Antiochian ethos while embracing those qualities of the prevailing cultures she deems admirable and useful. It's a wonderful chronicle of Antiochian history in North America and a pleasure to read.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IS NOT AN IDENTITY

Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick

MANY PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY VIA THE INTERNET – I AM MYSELF ONE OF THOSE (THOUGH IT WAS 1997 AND A VERY, VERY DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERE ONLINE THAN NOW). ALMOST ALL OF THE PEOPLE WHO NOW COME FOR THE FIRST TIME TO OUR PARISH IN EMMAUS, PENNSYLVANIA, HAVE HAD SOME CONTACT WITH OUR FAITH ON THE INTERNET FIRST. LIVING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, WE SHOULD EXPECT THIS TO BE THE NORM FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, ESPECIALLY HERE IN NORTH AMERICA.

I have been noticing a related phenomenon, though, that concerns me. I have known of people who have read about the faith and even interacted with Orthodox Christians online for years, without ever actually visiting an Orthodox church or perhaps only visiting a few times. In many cases, they present themselves as knowing a lot about what it

means to be Orthodox, or knowing enough to make decisions about being Orthodox.

I've also seen a more extreme phenomenon: there are people who call themselves "Orthodox" or "catechumens" who have never been to an Orthodox church or, again, only a handful of times. And no priest ever baptized or chrismated them, and no



priest ever made them catechumens. It's something they just decided for themselves.

Likewise, there are also people who really have become formally part of the Church through its sacraments, yet do not actually participate in its life with any regularity and faithfulness. For those of us who have been Orthodox for a while, we probably are most familiar with this phenomenon – people who identify as Orthodox because of a past reception into the Church yet do not actually live as Orthodox Christians.

Here's the problem with all three of these phenomena: Orthodox Christianity is not an "identity." To be an Orthodox Christian is to be faithful to Christ, which means real faithfulness in the 3D world – regular worship, daily prayer, fasting, almsgiving, kindness, humility and love.

We read many times in the Scriptures that in the end Christ is going to judge every one of us according to what we have done (Matthew 25:31–46, 1 Pet. 1:17, Revelation 20:12–13), not according to what we think, how we feel, what we agree with, if we have the right opinions, or whether we identify as Orthodox or not.

If you're not faithfully struggling to do these things, calling yourself "Orthodox" is simply a falsity. It's just not true. Likewise, if you're exploring Orthodox Christianity without including regularly and faithfully being at worship services, you're not really exploring Orthodox Christianity. Any decisions you make about it will not be informed ones. You might be learning *about* Orthodox Christianity, but without the *experience* of participating in parish life even as a visitor, you're missing most of the picture.

So if this describes you, even partially, here's my challenge for you. If at all possible, get out of your house and get to church. Get out of your head and go do the actual things. I understand that there are circumstances where it really is not possible, but if you're not even trying, if you've been content just to stay home, and think and read and talk about the Church, then I'm talking to you.

Yes, of course Orthodox Christianity should shape your reading, thinking, and speaking, but if that's all it ever does, then you're not a faithful Orthodox Christian. Nor are you really even considering becoming part of the Church. It can be a good step to read and think and talk about the Church, but if all that intellectual activity is not motivating you to get into church and live the actual life, to become faithful to Christ, then it's useless to your salvation and may even be harming it.

By these means you can also judge the things you see and hear on the Internet – if they're referring you only to themselves and not always pointing you to 3D life in the Church, then they're not helping. A proper teacher and guide should always be pointing you beyond himself and toward an encounter with Christ in His Church.

So let's get up, out of our heads, out of our chairs and houses, and into worship. See you there!

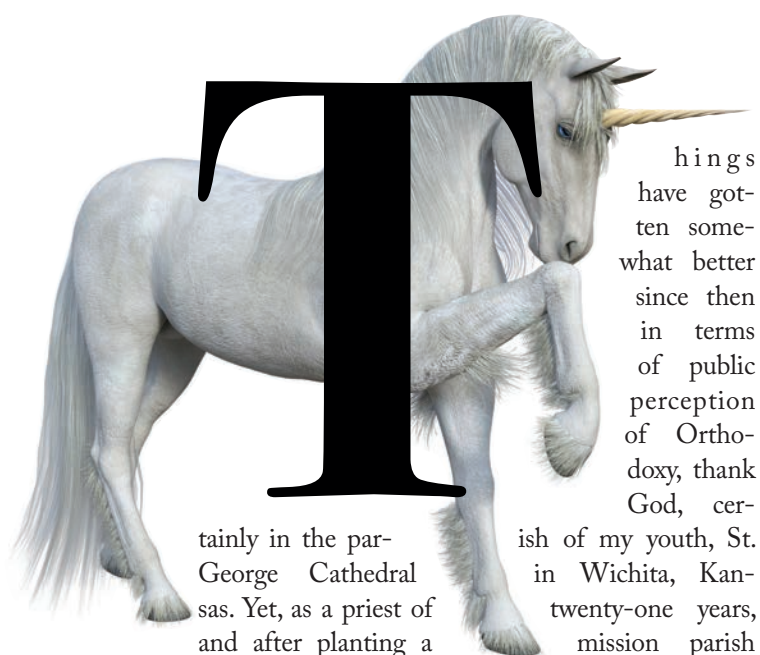


OUR BIG FAT GREEK ORTHODOX P.R. NIGHTMARE

ORTHODOXY, UNICORNS, AND MEDIA

Fr. Michael Shanbour

MORE THAN FORTY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE MY PARISH PRIEST QUIPPED: “WHEN PEOPLE DRIVE BY OUR CHURCH THEY SAY, ‘HEY, LOOK! ... IT’S THE *LEBANESE* CHURCH!’” NOW, I AM PROUD OF MY LEBANESE HERITAGE AND GRATEFUL THAT MY ANCESTORS MAINTAINED THEIR ORTHODOX FAITH AND PASSED IT ON TO ME. (MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER CAME FROM LEBANON TO PASTOR THE FIRST MEMBERS OF ST. ELIJAH IN OKLAHOMA CITY.) LET’S BE HONEST, HOWEVER: MOST AMERICANS ARE NOT GOING TO CONSIDER JOINING A “LEBANESE” CHURCH. WHY WOULD THEY? OKAY – EXCEPT FOR THE FOOD!



Things have gotten somewhat better since then in terms of public perception of Orthodoxy, thank God, cer-

tainly in the parish of my youth, St. George Cathedral in Wichita, Kansas. Yet, as a priest of twenty-one years, and after planting a mission parish in a small-ish city in Washington State more than twelve years ago, I find the major obstacle to Orthodox evangelism eerily similar to that “pre-American convert” period decades ago. If I’m not simply met with a blank stare after explaining that I’m an Orthodox Christian priest, I may hear something like, “Oh, I didn’t know there was a Greek church in Wenatchee!” How much has really changed? Lebanese to Greek? (Note: In other locales, the identification would be replaced by “Russian” or some other ethnic label.)

It is particularly maddening, considering that 95% of the people of our parish are American converts. We speak English, we worship in English, we advertise in English, we hold public events and retreats in English, and we have icons primarily labeled in English!

So How Did We Get Here? A Brief Summary of Orthodox “Public Relations”

There is both a longer and shorter historical explanation to this public-relations problem. As early as the year A.D. 800, the self-proclaimed new “Holy Roman Emperor,” Charlemagne, began a very successful public relations smear of the Eastern Roman (Orthodox) Christians, seeking to bolster and distinguish his authority by marginalizing the Easterners and narrowly applying the label *Greeks* to them.

Historically, and in their perception of themselves, they were *Romans*, consisting of a variety of nationalities, ethnicities and regional languages, though unified by a common Greek language. Charlemagne’s negative public relations campaign, however, was perhaps one of the most successful in history. The label stuck. Western Christians began to perceive their Eastern counterparts as “Greeks” rather than fellow Roman Orthodox-Catholic Christians. Complicating the situation, under the Turks each Patriarchate took on the official title “*Greek* Orthodox Catholic

Patriarchate of (*fill in the blank*).

The shorter history does not require much explanation. Orthodox immigrants to America and Canada maintained their ethnic identity largely through their church communities. Thus, Orthodoxy in America became something for Lebanese or Ukrainians or Serbians or, as they became the majority, for Greeks.

Now, it is a wonderful thing to be Greek! After all, the language of the New Testament Scriptures is Greek. However, while the common language of commerce in today's world is English, we don't call Africans or even Australians *English*, though they speak the language. We don't call Catholics in this country "*Latin Catholics*," although Latin was the vernacular of the West for centuries. Yet, somehow Americans in rural Washington are *Greek Orthodox*?

The purpose of this article is in no way to denigrate Greeks or Greek Orthodox Christians. The point is simply that if Orthodoxy in America is perceived as something for Greeks or Russians or Romanians, and so forth, we will place an unnecessary obstacle in the way of those who might otherwise consider embracing the Orthodox Christian faith in the Western Hemisphere. Most Orthodox Christians in America know this. The question is: What can we do about it?

We've not even mentioned the public-relations perception fiasco created by separate ethnically-labeled Orthodox jurisdictions. Before we get to first-base in explaining that we are Orthodox, we are required to rewind and attempt to *undo* the perception that "Greek Orthodox" and "some-other-kind-of Orthodox" are two distinct and separate "denominations," rather than united regional churches in full communion with one another! This is yet another Orthodox public relations nightmare and obstacle to sharing the Orthodox faith.

Have We Made Progress?

We are blessed to have had a renaissance of sorts in North America with an influx of converts to Orthodoxy over the past decades. It would appear we have begun to reach this country with the Orthodox faith. I would estimate that, through my priesthood, close to 150 people have entered the Orthodox Church. I have friends for whom the number would be much higher. Our various Orthodox jurisdictions now have departments dedicated to evangelism or communications. These days, we often find ourselves patting ourselves on the back for success in receiving

our fellow countrymen into the one Holy Church. Indeed, there are bishops, priests, and lay people who deserve great accolades for their evangelical efforts for the Faith.

Yet, when put into larger perspective, we have hardly *begun* to make a dent in the American scene. Orthodox Christians still make up only about .0024% of the population of the United States (800,000 divided by 330 million). That's 2.4-*thousandth*, or one *quarter* of one percent! (In our city, more Protestants move over to a different evangelical church each year than our Orthodox parish has received in twelve years.)

For more perspective, consider the following: Mormons only make up 1.7% of the American adult population (mostly in Utah, with 58%).¹

Yet it would be difficult to find any casual observer who is unaware that such a "church" exists, or does not have a general perception of what they're about. Not only do we recognize their missionaries walking down the street, but we have seen their public-service type advertisements on various media for "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Contrast this with the public awareness of Orthodox Christianity in America. When is the last time you saw an advertisement for the Orthodox Church? When is the last time, for example, you heard a mainstream western media source report on the "Holy Fire" at Pascha? Is anyone even trying to convey Orthodoxy to the media?

Providing a Foundation for Orthodox Evangelism

In conversations, I have been told that the only effective means of evangelism is a face-to-face, personal encounter. There is a lot of truth to this. Most people join a church because they were invited by a friend or neighbor. It is certainly the most effective means of evangelism and we should all try to practice it.

However, we cannot underestimate the power of awareness and perception. If I tell you I have a pet unicorn, you are unlikely to believe me. You know they don't exist. If I tell an American there is a Church that has faithfully maintained the faith of the apostles from the time of the Resurrection to our day, that it follows the Bible in the way the Christian Church has always believed, and that it is not "Catholic" or "Protestant," they are just as unlikely to believe me. They "know" such a thing does not exist. (If they know it exists, they don't perceive it in the

way I have just described it.) They are more familiar with unicorns than Orthodoxy! At least they have *heard* of unicorns and have seen them depicted. They have encountered a unicorn in retail stores and children's books. They likely have not encountered Orthodoxy, whether in fictional depictions or reality. If they have, and know that we exist, their perception would likely be that it is not something for them.

All of this is an oversimplification. When, however, I approach someone face-to-face, and begin to tell them about the Orthodox Church, too often what *they* hear is, "I have a pet unicorn." They smile and say, "That is wonderful for you," and go back to what they "know" to be real. They have no context, no foundation, no experience,

direct or indirect, no knowledge of such a thing. It's just too easy to dismiss. And most of the time our face-to-face encounters are quite brief. I may have twenty seconds in Costco or at the grocery store to speak with someone who asks about the cross I'm wearing.

If they had seen something about the Orthodox Church on Youtube, however, that it is for all people, not just "Greeks," and later they saw something similar on Facebook, and then they hear a radio ad from their local Orthodox church, and they see an article in their newspaper ... suddenly there might be some legitimacy to all of this. Maybe unicorns *do* exist! Now when I speak with them in Costco, I don't have to spend those precious twenty seconds trying to convince them that unicorns do exist, or spend twenty minutes undoing all of their misconceptions and misperceptions about the Orthodox Church.

I met one of my (now) godsons when he was working as a youth director at the local Presbyterian church. I'm not sure our meeting would have had the same effect if he had not just seen the "60 Minutes" special on Mount Athos. That's what made Orthodoxy "legitimate" and appealing in his mind. *Then* he met a real live Orthodox Christian.

Are we really using the resources available to us

to support our evangelic efforts? Are there some rather simple things we could do to educate and prepare the ground of our culture by providing a basic knowledge of the Orthodox Church to Americans?

What We Have Done So Far

Relatively small in numbers, but strong on enthusiasm and conviction, our parish has used a number of avenues to build awareness and educate our wider community about Orthodoxy. Keep in mind that the culture and mindset in our area, and particularly in our immediate valley, is generally insular, highly western-centric religiously, skeptical, and biased about anything "foreign" or "different," and lacking in ethnic diversity, with only

a tiny number of ethnic Orthodox Christian residents. Any idea of a "true" Church is offensive, with "closed communion" considered a grave "sin." I have already alluded to the misconceptions related to ethnicity and Orthodoxy.

In the last decade, we have held a significant number of speaking engagements, retreats, and events open to the public, with high-profile names like Frederica Mathewes-Greene. We have utilized radio advertising, in some cases over a period of a whole year, with interesting and provocative messages. One such ad asked: "If Jesus Christ is the *same* yesterday, today and forever, why does 'church' seem to *change* all the time?" We have created a small arsenal of such ads, but to sustain radio advertising is cost-prohibitive. (We do not have a local news affiliate, whether NBC, ABC or CBS, with which to create awareness.)

These efforts have produced some immediate fruit, but have mostly planted "seeds," creating an awareness that we're really not that scary and, one hopes, planting the idea that, maybe, just maybe, exploring the Orthodox Church would be an option that local residents could consider.

Most recently, we created a YouTube ad introducing Orthodoxy and our local parish. There



are several advantages to this venue: 1) it allows very specific targeting of the desired audience based on numerous factors; 2) it is the place to find many seekers; and 3) it is quite inexpensive. When a viewer watches the entire video, they are offered a free copy of my book, *Know the Faith* from Ancient Faith Publishing. When we receive requests, we mail the book out. (Just today, I met with someone at the church after he had watched our video and read my book.)

Several years ago, we also created a website, appropriately called “BestKeptSecret.Today.” It provides some short introductory videos, a few “journey to Orthodoxy” stories from some of our own parishioners, as well as Q&A’s. A pop-up appears on this site offering a free copy of the same book. We also have business cards and magnetic “bumper stickers” advertising this site.

What Could Be Done?

I strongly believe that, while each Orthodox parish must do as much as possible locally to introduce people to our faith, we also need a system of support. If our various outreach methods are likened to planting seeds (as our Lord Himself envisions them), then these supportive measures can help “till the ground” to receive the seed. Our North American culture, whether religious or secular, is not particularly fertile ground for the seed of Orthodoxy. My thesis is that this tilling of the ground might be funded and executed best on a national level, so that we are not constantly “reinventing the wheel” and expending our energies ineffectively with overlapping efforts.

What is preventing us Orthodox in America, and our Archdiocese in particular, from producing an ongoing supply of YouTube ads for purposes of dispelling commonly held misconceptions and objections, as well as educating our fellow citizens about the Church? Because this media can be so highly targeted, ads could be created for various types of seekers from a range of backgrounds, ages and other categories and demographics. (For example, ads could be created for the traditional Catholic, the overly-entertained Protestant church-goer, the Millennial, the so-called “None,” and the former atheist. Our parish has recently received several former atheists looking for truth, meaning, and authenticity.)

There are a plethora of messages that would be particularly enlightening to North Americans regarding the theological understanding of the Orthodox Church. (For example, ads could inform

viewers that Christianity is actually an “*Eastern religion*,” that the Atonement is not about God being insulted and angry, that the Church is a “spiritual hospital” for the healing of the soul, that salvation is not a legal release from guilt but union with the Living God, that Christian worship was always liturgical and a participation in the worship continually active in heaven, that the books of the New Testament were selected by the Church, and so forth). Ads might be created in a way that would allow editing or an addition for the promotion of a specific parish and locale. That addition could include the local Orthodox priest making a warm introduction. Or perhaps they could be edited and customized for specific parishes or regions at a central location.

Imagine a potential YouTube ad visually illustrating the reality that the Orthodox Church in the West is not just for “ethnic” people, Greeks, Arabs, Russians, and so on, but for *all* people. The video shows a series of different individuals: one is blue-eyed, another African-American, one has red hair and freckles, another is Asian, one has an Australian accent, another is Native American, and another Hispanic, male, female, young, old, “cool” and “nerdy,” tall, short, curly hair, straight hair, and so forth, but all born in America and all Orthodox Christians. (Granted, many of these ethnicities represent an insignificant minority within our churches, but they do exist, and that is the point.) By all means, include a Greek, a Russian, a Serb, an Arab. When shown on camera, each says, “I am an Orthodox Christian.” Finally, the announcer states: “The ancient and apostolic Orthodox Christian Church *is* and *has always been* for all people.” He might add: “We are all united by the ancient and unchanging Christian teachings and practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church.” The viewer would then be directed to the website of a local Orthodox church, depending on the targeted area(s).

Another ad might briefly highlight Orthodox charitable programs offered in America and worldwide, in order to establish that the Church is actively engaged in loving outreach to the “least of My brethren”: FOCUS North America, Project Mexico, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, Reconciliation Ministries (Kansas City), St. Herman House (Cleveland), the Tree House (Wichita), and various camps and schools.

Another ad could dispels the notion that the Orthodox Church does not do evangelical outreach,

but is only inward-looking. A brief history of the spread of the Orthodox Christian Faith could be followed by a statement like this: “Today the Orthodox Church has a growing presence around the world, including in England and Western Europe, South America, Mexico, Guatemala, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and, yes, the U.S. and Canada.”

All of these, if not directly inviting viewers to consider Orthodoxy, would implicitly help to influence perceptions, increase understanding, and therefore “till the ground” of our culture, and raise awareness and receptiveness to the mostly unknown, invisible “unicorn” in the room.

Of course, there are other social media platforms and contexts where these same ads could have an impact.

National: Media Relations

And what about the national media as a means to cultivate awareness of Orthodoxy? Have we no devout Orthodox Christians in the world of national media or with any influence in the sphere of media? What is our present effort at media relations, if any? What is our strategy? Do we have anyone devoted to ensuring that the media presents Orthodox history, theology and spirituality accurately and according to the official teachings of the Church?

How is it possible that not one of the national networks or cable news channels covers the miracle of the holy fire/light in Jerusalem each year? Is there a bigger story? What about a program like “60 Minutes”? What about the “new media” that is reaching millions of people through the Internet? Why do we rely on trickle-down media relations?

When our holy sites in Syria were being decimated by ISIS, would it not have been an opportune time to communicate (again and again) that these places are historical holy sites belonging to the original Christian Church, the Orthodox Church, that they existed from the earliest centuries of the Christian Faith, that our Patriarch of Antioch resides in Damascus on the “street called Straight” where the apostle Paul was baptized, and that he is the 164th in direct succession to the apostle Peter? Were any national media outlets made aware of these realities? Indeed, a most unfortunate context for news coverage, but still an extraordinary opportunity to educate those in the West and plant seeds in searching hearts.

To drive this point home, let me share a conver-

sation between one of our parishioners (whom I will call “Mary”) and a Protestant woman (“Sue”). Mary is telling Sue about the book, *Syria Crucified*, and the many Syrian Christians who were hunted down and persecuted by ISIS or others in recent times. After hearing about this, Sue exclaimed, “Gosh! I hope the *missionaries* were able to get out!” In other words, Sue was completely unaware (despite her presumed knowledge of the Bible) that indigenous Orthodox Christians exist in Syria, and have lived there for two thousand years!

Every month, if not weekly, events occur that might present an opening to interject the Orthodox Christian understanding of the nature of life and death, of God and man, into the public square. These are teachable moments and evangelic opportunities. Who will be ready to facilitate an Orthodox response when the next opportunity arises?

Some may counter: If we draw attention to ourselves, we open ourselves to criticism and more possible misunderstanding. I would answer: If we do nothing, we are certain to remain misunderstood, relying on those who misunderstand us to act as our public relations department. It is true, such public awareness of the Church will mean that we will have to be accountable for our problems and mistakes. Isn't that a good thing? At least we will be assuming responsibility for our own destiny, humanly speaking.

We need never be ashamed of our rich Orthodox ethnic heritage. We have much to offer the western world. But more than this heritage, we have a more enduring gift to offer: the Holy Orthodox faith and the Church that was founded by our Savior Jesus Christ, who commanded us to “go, therefore, and make disciples of *all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Fr. Michael Shanbour, Pastor
Three Holy Hierarchs Church, Wenatchee, Washington

1. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/07/24/a-portrait-of-mormons-in-the-us/>

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS
BEAUTY IS BORN!
GLORIFY HIM!

Fr. John Oliver



Meet Maya Tamar, Director of the Emotion and Self-Regulation Laboratory at The Hebrew University, in Jerusalem. Her field of study? Depression, and how sufferers of that affliction can learn to regulate their emotions. To “regulate” emotion does not mean to suppress or pretend, but to navigate and channel attention toward one’s highest values. It is to rethink or reframe a challenging situation in order to reduce anger or anxiety, to focus on reasons for feeling happy or calm, or to consider suffering in new ways of reflection and even with gratitude. All this is to regulate emotions by controlling them before they control us.

Maya and her researchers conducted a series of experiments, asking both depressed and non-depressed persons to choose for themselves between looking at sad pictures or amusing pictures. What did they find? That the depressed persons chose significantly more of the sad pictures, even though they clearly had the option to avoid them. Next, the two groups could choose for themselves between listening to melancholy music or upbeat music. What did they find? The depressed persons chose more of the melancholy music, even though they had the option to avoid it. Finally, the two groups could choose for themselves between seeing situations as negative, or being trained to see them in a positive light. What did they find? The depressed persons chose more often than the non-depressed persons not to re-frame the situations in a positive way. In experiment after experiment, depressed persons, even when

presented with options that would help them feel better, chose for themselves the options that would keep them feeling bad.

Baffling, yes? Yet Maya's discovery confirms what the prophet Isaiah knew long ago, that "we all fade like a

leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away,” and that “I cry, ‘Look away from me, let me weep bitterly, do not try to comfort me’” (Isaiah 64:6; 22:4). Feeling, even choosing, the dark, is not just a depression thing; it is a human thing.

How does Maya put it? “Whenever I need to reinforce my negative mood, I will choose the ways to do that; when I want to stay with my familiar sadness, I will choose the ways to do that; when I don’t want to be around joy because it will just make me feel guilty for feeling sorrow, I will choose the ways to do that.”

Sure, sometimes there is no choice in it: the dark exigencies of life overwhelm our ability to escape them and we descend into some dank and moody psychic crawlspace for a while. At other times, however, the clarity of choice remains, and we see a way out, but without choosing the way out. Maya told us we would do that, which brings us back to Isaiah.

When the prophet ink-and-quilled his excitement that “the people who walk in darkness will see a great light” (9:2), those people, hunkered down in Galilee in the previous chapter, had been doing some hand-wringing under the dark cloud of a foreign threat. But the prophet predicted that the Messiah would come to liberate the people: “that

light that will illumine your darkness is not a political system but a Person."

Yet, is seeing the Messiah the same as choosing the Messiah? Seeing is not always believing, is it? The Light who will soon be born one chilled December night will illumine all, even those who refuse its glow: some will see and not believe; some will see and will not budge; some will see and will not choose. "What then do you want me to do with the One you call the King of the Jews?" And they shouted back, 'Crucify Him!'"

They are us and we are they. Oh, how the Via

courage to stand in the darkness we have chosen for ourselves that overlaps with the darkness we have not, and ask, "Is this all there will be to my life?"

Suddenly, there it is – a certain slant of light, not overpowering, just ... present. The grace of God is reaching us, and our fresh awakening begins not first with truth – for truth alone does not always compel one to believe – but with beauty, the unsurpassable beauty of the Christ Event.

The gods of pagan antiquity – haunting the skies in Isaiah's time – would never condescend to take up residence in a human womb and submit to the indignity of a birth canal and a nurturing breast. Never. Those gods were only obsessed with violent and impersonal calculations of power. They could be feared, obeyed, but never loved. Those gods would never soil themselves with your mortality.

Isaiah's God did, however. He not only desired the healing of humankind from death and sin and evil, but set that healing in motion by shockingly entering our hopelessness with His own sinless perfection. He put literal skin into the game – His light into our darkness, His radiance into our shadows. He even began with a womb and a birth canal, with swaddling clothes and helplessness. This God of such condescension could be feared, could be obeyed, and could be loved.

We may see the Light but not choose the Light if, by some festering wound from the past, we believe we belong in darkness. We take our sad place among Maya's subjects, pulling away from the amusing pictures and the upbeat music and the re-framing of our situation toward the positive. We don't need more strategies for feeling hopeful, though, do we? We know them already. If we can begin to believe that hopeful is what we were created to be, then the strategies will fall into place.

When drifting in darkness, choosing the Light does not begin with rules telling us we should do something, or a conscience shaming us when we don't. It begins with beauty, with wonder, with catching a glimpse of what is possible for our lives when grafted to the Christ of possibility. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, we begin emerging from shadow into a spiritual romance as the historical events of the Nativity of Christ become inward spiritual realities, and we soon rediscover the magnificent core of the Christian story – love.

Beauty is Born! Glorify Him!



Dolorosa winds through each human heart! There are times we see and do not believe, we see and do not budge, we see and do not choose. "God looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 53:2).

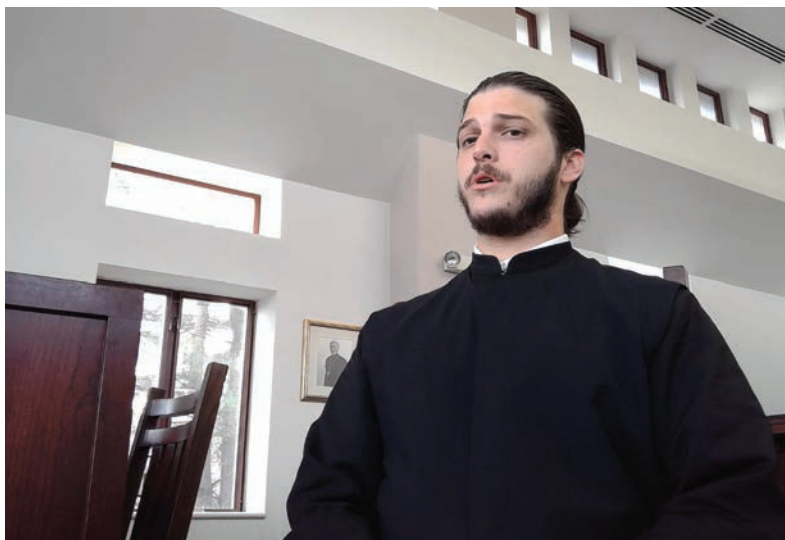
But here, in the shadows, slouched beneath the downward pressure of a will too sick, time and time again, to choose otherwise, we take a deep breath and ask, "Is this as good as it gets?" We summon the

WORDS ABOUT VOCATIONS FROM OUR VOCATIONS

DEACON JOSEPH THORNBURG

I am 28 years old, born and raised in Riverside California, at St. Andrew Church. I am married for a little over eight years now. My wife and I have two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, Isaac and Elizabeth. I'm a convert; I came from an evangelical-charismatic background. I was exposed to Orthodoxy through my wife. She and her family converted when we were just teenagers. I had been exposed to Orthodoxy through them. I would go with them to Liturgy and Vespers. I just hated it. I hated Orthodoxy. I didn't understand it. I thought it was bad, Roman Catholic, and that they worshipped Mary. Then I got older and started dating the woman who became my wife; we started dating, but had known each other from childhood. I started looking at Orthodoxy differently, through more mature eyes. I started a theological degree and reading about Church history. That was a big one for me. It opened up my world. I realized that evangelicalism was a very young tradition. My study opened me up to the early Church and I started reading people like St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom. That really initiated the conversion process for me. So I decided to become Orthodox, even if the relationship with my wife were not to work out. I thank God: both worked out. I was baptized and married later that year.

My work history was not very long. I was a janitor at my church, St. Andrew, for five or six years. I did some construction work, and apprenticed as an electrician, but my big-boy job was serving as a Workman's Compensation examiner for six years. That was a great job, but, going in, I knew I wasn't going to stay there. Quite frankly, I knew I was going to do this and be a priest. As an evangelical I thought that I would be a pastor. I was eight or nine years old when I felt that desire, or calling, drawn to serve Christ and serve the Church. That never



went away when I became Orthodox. So, I told my spiritual father that this was happening after I was baptized, and where I was coming from. For years I kept my head down, and thought he had forgotten about it. As a youth worker and all, whenever the doors of the Church were open you are going to be there. I didn't think I would be there, but father said I want you to be at Seminary, so there it is. God's will be done.

My seminary experience has been unbelievable and fantastic compared to what I expected. I wasn't sure what kind of theological training we would be exposed to, but so far it has been amazing. This is the case not only on the theological side, which has been great, but what has really amazed me is the community I am surrounded by. I have been able to gain so much from the talent here, to drink deeply, and to be changed by their knowledge and wisdom, by them. This was especially so in my second-year class. Sponsoring their children (in baptism) and building bonds and ties that will last a lifetime is something I am truly grateful for. The Seminary community has given me that.

First, Sayidna JOSEPH has made it clear that

there is a need for this vocation, diaconal and priestly. If you are a man in good standing in the Church and want to serve the Church, what are you waiting for? I face my own inner struggle: Am I worthy? I realized, however, that God works through other people. Regardless of my inner desires, He works through these things. If my spiritual father doesn't think I am in delusion, and if I am in agreement with my wife, what am I waiting for? I had to come to grips with understanding that there is a real need for this, at this time in our land: priests are dying or retiring, so those positions need to be filled, and young men need to stand up and serve Christ. They need to put aside any fake humility about it and be practical. I like how Sayidna JOSEPH has been very straightforward about that and very practical. The financial support that we get from the Archdiocese is important, especially today. Sayidna has been calling people and paying for them to be here. It is one thing to say we need the help, and another to help them when they get here. The Archdiocese has done that.

I have a godson who is going to graduate, maybe next year, and has visited the Seminary. Now he has been exposed to priests and deacons in the making, and he is sort of wide-eyed about it. I told him, of course, that this is a beautiful thing to desire, but I told him keep his head down, do his work, and find out if monasticism is for him, or if his calling is the married life, and it will organically or naturally happen. It's not like a lightning bolt; usually it's a word from your spiritual father, someone you trust, or even a word spoken to you in your own heart. If this happens, go to your spiritual father and he can confirm or deny that. If you love God and are there when the doors open and want to be in the altar, or at the chant stand, it makes sense. Check your prayer life. Are you confessing; how are you living? These are the things I tell people. If not, would you want to get into it (the priesthood) for the money? (Laugh.) You won't make that much money.

Seminary has given me perspective. I have seen the importance of sobriety in the face of many different entanglements that can happen in parish life, whichever parish it might be. With our parish assignments, you dip your toe into what is going on. When we visit the parishes, we get an idea of what it is like to serve as a priest in this milieu and this climate. Working with the youth or at the chant stand gives you a lot of reasons to be sober. It's not

the easiest thing or the prettiest thing. Having that practical, hands-on experience is the real thing. We are not going to be in the classroom in the parishes. We are going to be the parish priests. I need to know how to deal with the real parishioners I am going to encounter. I need to learn, internally and outwardly, how to deal with whatever comes up.

MARK SULTANI

I'm from Detroit, Michigan, the son of immigrants from historically traditional Orthodox villages in Lebanon and Syria. I grew up within a robust Church community, with lots of family and close friends. My mom made sure I was in church, even if I faked being sick, no matter what! I started serving in the altar as a young child. I'm the third child; I have two older sisters. My family played a large role in my early spiritual formation. Learning how to pray at home. My sisters came home from camp and would tell me what we believe, and the stories of saints in our Church, which inspired me from a young age. I studied computer science and worked for a year as a software developer. From that time, I decided to go to seminary. I went in a roundabout way. I worked for a year as an intern at St. George in Phoenix, and from there applied to seminary. So here I am, and I'm in my second year.

I grew up going to the Antiochian Village and that was very formative for me, and even essential for my own conversion. Although I grew up as a cradle Orthodox, my faith needed to be my own: not just my family's faith, but my own. Or perhaps I needed my faith to evolve from being my family's faith to my own. That process was facilitated at the Antiochian Village. When I was in high school, there was one year in particular in which I fell in love with the Church. I fell in love with the services, with the saints. I was greatly influenced by a camp counselor. I felt his love for me and could see his love for God. That example, set in a relationship of love, really inspired me and has stuck with me eleven years later. I went home from camp and started chanting and started going to Orthros. I was so excited about church, and learning about God and what he does and has done for us, that I wanted to dedicate my life to Christ and serve God and serve the Church. I wanted to serve the people, because I could see how desperately God is needed, especially by my peers. The advice I was given was that I should finish high school and go to college. I

shouldn't pretend I was in seminary while in college, but *be* in college. I still didn't know if I would go to seminary. That was very distant and scary. I studied computer science and I liked it, but all my free time was spent in OCF [Orthodox Christian Fellowship] and in Church. Everything I was reading for pleasure outside of class was from the Church. So these were clear indicators to me that computer science may not be my end goal here. So I finished college and then worked for a year. My life seemed perfect; working as a software developer, living with my parents, an easy job, an easy life, singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, traveling on weekends to spend time with friends – I got to do all the things I enjoyed doing. Everything seemed perfect, but I had an inner unrest. I knew I wasn't living up to my full potential. Perhaps I wasn't doing what God wanted. I wasn't serving God as much as I could. During Holy Week I started thinking it might be time to go to seminary. I started talking to family and friends. I got a lot of support, and some pushback by people close to me. I decided to do it. I don't think it was coincidental that it happened at Pascha. It was after fasting during Lent, and going to all the services, that I had the courage to do what was so scary and daunting for me. I haven't looked back. As perfect as my life was in the past, and with as many variables as there are in my future, I am really happy. I am really happy here.

Most surprising was the spiritual formation that can happen here. I thought that seminary would be class and chapel, but you really feel God's hand on you, molding you, shaping you into somebody who can be of service, a useful vessel. That spiritual formation has happened for me through the academic life, the chapel life, community life, and through my friends here, whom I love so much. We would be in the church basement studying someone like St. Ignatius of Antioch, and then we would go upstairs and pray vespers, maybe for St. Ignatius of Antioch. We are living the experience in the chapel and in our day-to-day service of each other that which we are studying. Then the frequent confession and spiritual formation meetings really serve to change my perspective and my relationship with God, and to develop my spiritual life. I came here thinking that I knew everything, and I came here thinking I would teach others, and then realized how little I really know, and how far I need to go and grow.

My shout out would go to Fr. Bogdan Bucur, a

really phenomenal professor. His Intro to the Old Testament was our first class. He takes this book, which in my case I had already read once, and opens it up in ways I would have never foreseen. One thing that I love is that he takes the high theology (the lofty academic thinking) and masterfully brings it down to a practical, mundane level. He can tell you what this fourth-century writer was saying, or in what way this Old Testament writer matters to your life today. I found that inspiring, and I want to replicate it and bring that to the people in the parish. I feel that we have a divorce between theology and daily life, but really the Church brings these things together. She fuses the presence of God to our day-to-day life.

The Archdiocese played a massive role in my life, as I was a staff person at the Antiochian Village for three years. I don't know if I would be here were it not for the relationships that I made there. Living an Orthodox life in suburban America is very hard. So, living in that Orthodox (Camp) community was like an incubator for my spiritual life and devotion to God. The frequency of the services and immersion into the community served to charge my heart. They made me fall in love with the Church again. The support of the Archdiocese of seminarians, making sure that anyone who wants to come can come regardless of costs, regardless of finances, or work status, is wonderful. Just knowing that the Archdiocese has my back makes me rest more easily. It puts me at ease thinking about fellow seminarians and about my own future as well. When I am done seminary and go out to a parish, I know that the Archdiocese will guide me where I need to be.

The best advice I got was to avoid seminary until I couldn't avoid it anymore. That was told to me by somebody who came to seminary and was a clergyman. I found that to be good advice for me in my youthful zeal. Had I come straight out of college, I think it might have been premature. Those years of growth, holding in tension the desire to go, and waiting for the time to be right, was invaluable. The idea that I should avoid it until I couldn't any longer was helpful for me. First immerse yourself in the depths of what the Church offers us. You receive life in God from reading the Scriptures, personal prayer, and liturgical services. I tell those who ask about vocations to read and study, and then if they feel a call to serve the Church, come to seminary. Start with yourself, growing and learning. Make yourself open

and flexible to hearing God's word and following where he may direct you.

Young people need to hear so many things from the Church. The Church is a home or safe haven in a world that is constantly producing storms. The world is constantly changing and can't rest. You can find no rest in the world. What looks like a good life in the world outside the Church promises that doing what you want will make you happy. That world is shallow and will not provide that happiness we seek. It is the Church that is our safe harbor that will give us a place to rest. It is the only place where we can find that peace that is untouchable, that peace that cannot be swayed or destroyed by the evil in the world. Church is the home we are all looking for. We look for it in other places, but it won't be found there.

JOHN CALEB MCGEE

I am from Tennessee, 38 years old, and currently unmarried. I'm the oldest of three



children; we are all Orthodox. A few years ago, my mother passed away; my father is still living.

I was inspired by several events. Ever since I graduated college, I have done youth work. I was staying at a monastery for three months for discernment, and there was a young man there who was there for other reasons. My interactions with him helped me recognize that there are many people out there who need to be ministered to. They need to hear the Gospel and feel God's love for them.

It stirred something inside of me that made me go home. The second thing was when my mother died. We did all of the things the Church offers. Being able to witness all of the prayers, the priest coming to anoint her and all that we did to prepare her and ourselves was helpful. The Church community offered such support and help. I realized I want to be able to do this. To be there for families and offer others what the Church gave us: those mercies of the Church, the love of God, and the love of the community. Working with the Church youth and the Church itself is fulfilling. Some think there is only one way to do things. We need to learn to let God direct us, and we learn then how to be a minister and when to step in and when to do things. Sharing God's love and helping others helps you at the same time. We are all growing together.

Surprises? I did have expectations, but I didn't expect to learn how to be a more vulnerable person. That definitely happened very quickly. That has to do with the seminary and with my classmates. I tended to be a more reserved person. Being here with my fellow Antiochians and the other guys in my class who are here to be ordained, and those who are in the Master of Arts program, allowed us all to grow so close so quickly. We just became very supportive and honest with each other. Though we came from different places and different backgrounds, we formed community almost like we were a parish. That was a huge surprise for me. I didn't expect that. All the things I thought I knew when I came here, I found out I didn't know. I remember taking my Old Testament class with Fr. Bogdan and remember jumping up and saying, What? Oh my goodness! I had read these things and didn't make these connections. I really begin to understand what the Church teaches, what the Fathers teach. It is just incredible. You know, I did expect some things, but you can't know. You set your expectations low and don't realize how much higher you should have set the bar. It is just wonderful.

The world needs to hear of God's love. It needs to hear about Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Church has a way to respond to calamity and struggles. Always hearing that God loves us will help us endure. There is a tendency to shut down and separate from others, but we need to hear that God loves us and it's going to be OK. That is what we hear from Fr. Chad and the Metropolitan. You don't have to stress yourself out. Pray, and

love each other, and work toward solutions. A lot of times that message is said, but we don't hear it. We should put it on Youtube and play it over and over. The Church calendar keeps bringing us back to this same message. If we keep repeating this, perhaps people will learn, or hear, or see. Through this people will begin to grow.

Years ago, Sayidna JOSEPH visited Memphis for the first time. Sayidna NICHOLAS was there then, too. At that time, I was burnt out, but then I heard their messages and homilies. I remember that when I went back to my job, I gave it a couple of weeks, and put in my notice. The bishops showed me that I needed to refocus on my spiritual life. I had been lacking. I thank God that I was in a place where I could do that. Perhaps my response was extreme, to put my notice in, but I wanted to get out of that job, and retreat, and heal. That is how I ended up at the monastery for a few months. Here, when bishops visit and share meals, we feel supported. We got to be with Sayidna JOSEPH recently, and to me that was huge. To be able to listen to the bishops and hear them is big. I think also to be able to come here and not worry about finances is very good. I don't know if others say that. We still have things to worry about, but for the Archdiocese to say we don't need to worry about the actual seminary costs is enormous. This allows us to concentrate more on what the seminary has to offer for priestly formation. It is good that we have our instructors here, too, Frs. Nicholas and John, who give us specific Antiochian instructions, not just in terms of liturgy, but in other parish practices. The parish assignment is also huge. I like it a lot, because I had basically only been to one church and now see a variety of community and liturgical practices. I want to see what the whole Archdiocese is like. It is so rich. That is part of my formation as a priest, because I need to be prepared to walk in and serve a community.

I've enjoyed St. Vlad's a hundred percent. I'm not saying it is a cakewalk. Every hardship I go through is worth it because, when you are here and know you have the call, everything you do in answering the call is beneficial. I wasn't really sure it was for me to be here until I got here, and then I knew I had made the right choice. I treasure every moment I have here.

DEACON MARK MAKARIOS

I am from St. George Parish in Houston Texas, and married to Shamseah Marian. I had many jobs before coming to seminary. I started out as a para-legal, and moved to Houston, Texas, where I worked in oil and gas. I also worked as a schoolteacher, and in retail as well.

I had a Muslim upbringing in Libya. As early as I can remember, we were praying. Certainly, I always believed in God, but struggled to feel a personal relationship with Him, or knowledge or experience of Him. That is what brought me into Christianity: looking for a personal experience. In a way, I just stumbled upon the Scriptures and the Church. All of that led me to Christ in my college years.

After converting, I very much enjoyed my time in church. I wanted to be in church as much as possible. It always crossed my mind to serve the Church more fully as clergy. I put it off, resisted for years, but the thought kept coming back. The reason I had so many career changes is that none of them was what I was looking for. What led me finally to making the move to pursuing ordination was getting to know the bishops and the clergy, seeing their example. It was helpful, too, to meet Fr. George Katreb, become friends with him, and see him come back from seminary as a single guy, get married, and then ordained to the diaconate and priesthood. His advice and example were very encouraging to me.

The support of Sayidna JOSEPH and the Archdiocese has been immense. As Antiochian



seminarians, we have a “point person” in Fr. Nick, and now also Fr. Jeremy. This is very helpful; they are always available. The parish assignments have been a huge benefit. Of course, the financial support has been a big thing. Because of the Archdiocese and The Order of St. Ignatius, we do not worry about finances and are able to concentrate on our studies. This has been great. Communication and the process of knowing where we are going to go next has been really smooth. Thank God. This has been a huge blessing.

Life at seminary is not what I would have imagined, and I was told that before I came. It is definitely an Orthodox bubble that comes with good points and bad. St. Tikhon's is not a big place. My class in particular was faced with the pandemic. We got through it. As in a family, some times are good, and the first year everyone was new. Then, coming into the second year, you see each other's jagged edges and rub against each other. What comes from that is very beautiful. In the growth that happens here, you start as strangers in a group; with Christ and the Church, you come out one strong group ready for ministry.

Here at St. Tikhon's, the monastery plays a huge role in preparing us for parish ministry. It is a huge blessing to have three years to observe the monastery and to be welcomed into the lives of the monks. The professors are great, and we had a lot of good teachers and mentors. I'm reminded of something Fr. Sergius told us the first week of class: We are not going to teach you everything, but we will teach you where everything is and how to find it. Three years is not enough to know and practice, but it is enough to give us a foundation and an Orthodox ethos. Three years is enough to mature us and to prepare us to keep working and to serve the Church.

It is hard to single any one out, but, because we miss him, my shout out would be to Dr. Harry Boosalis, who has gone back to Greece. He taught us all of our dogmatics and he was very good. He got to know each of us and our background, and then assigned each of us the Church Fathers that would help us the most. His focus was on what most people would think is complicated and difficult, but he showed us how to explain theology in simple terms that make sense. This helps you think about things and explain them.

What the world needs to hear from the Church is mercy. It is something I feel the world doesn't

have a lot of, especially outside the Christian world. The possibility of new life and new starts is a much-needed message. People are hurting and need a place where they can experience forgiveness and healing. That is just not out there. We should be patient and kind, and our churches places where people can receive forgiveness and mercy.

NICOLA NUNU

I am a first-year seminarian at St. Tikhon Seminary, from Dearborn, Michigan, the Basilica of St. Mary in Livonia. I'm the oldest of four siblings. I'm unmarried and 24 years old. Before seminary, I attended the University of Michigan pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering. I completed that with a bachelor's and master's degrees in pursuit of a position in the medical field. I wanted to be a doctor. I also helped out with the family business.

How did God rescue you from that?

Rescue is the right word. I was deep in the medical rabbit hole, or a big part of it; it was all I knew. I felt called to ministry from age seven, but I ignored it and it lay dormant. Still, I kept coming back to it. I knew that there was something here. Ultimately, after graduating with my Master's, I faced the choice: would I go through seven years of medical school and then work to make it worth it, and then do what I think I'm supposed to do, where my potential is, or just take the leap? So, thank God, here we are.

Two people who formed me personally were my parents. Whether or not she knew it, my mother in keeping up with her spiritual life influenced me. I grew up watching her reading the Scriptures and praying in her prayer corner. She was spiritual in her personal life and that carried through to all of her interactions. She gave more of herself than she needed to, but that is a mother's love. I learned how to work hard from my dad, and how to take care of the people you love. Those two examples combined led me to want to work for Christ and to serve His flock. Also, I grew up going to the Antiochian Village, where I experienced Christ's love in another way that had been foreign to me in my school life with my friends. That is another major thread in my coming here.

Metropolitan JOSEPH and the Archdiocese have been a tremendous help. The financial help, and being given the opportunity to be in a parish

and learn not just from professors, but from those doing this daily – has been great. Also, doing youth ministry in the parishes or at the camp and my parish while I'm here has meant a lot to me.

Life at the seminary is unique. I've never lived in this kind of community. Walking around campus we greet each other as brothers and call each other brother. There really is a brotherhood among the seminarians, and to be here so close to the monastery has been beautiful. It's a blessing. As one pursuing a married life, this is a rare opportunity, to live around a monastery. To be able to be involved in their religious cycle, build relationships with the monks, and learn from them directly has been awesome. Another thing that I have learned here is how to be quiet. We live in the woods, with Walmart thirty minutes away. You have no choice but to learn how to find God in the still and the quiet.

What the world needs to hear today is that God is merciful and loving, that we can come back to Him, and that we shouldn't put our hope and trust in other things. We give our troubles and worries to God and let Him carry that cross for us. Ultimately, we are meant to find rest in Him. God is our savior and nothing else is going to save us.

I would encourage others to follow their vocations. I'll still be a doctor, not of bodies, but of souls. So, I think that this for me is the better way to serve. There are needs for doctors, particularly in underserved communities, but this is the real fulfillment of service for me.

Nick, you come off as a happy guy, do you ever get down?

I definitely like being happy, and this too is a great lesson from my mom. She says that, if you have a choice, be happy, be filled with joy. Why not? Christ is risen! The world is hard around us, even here as the assignments are piling up and there is stress, but I learned you can't do it alone. It would be easy to withdraw, but for me I found that it's important to find the people who can support me, and I get the help. My brother says that, for self-care today, I'm going to get my work done. I've learned to do that from him.

FR. EPHRAIM VEST

I am from Louisville Kentucky. I'm 40 years old and the youngest of three children; I have two older sisters. My parent's and I converted to Orthodoxy when I was 27. I have six girls; my youngest was born on the second day of classes of my first year. I was in advertising for 13 years, and before that I taught. I went to college to become a teacher. My family had an ad business. When I converted to Orthodoxy, I lost my job because I taught in a Calvinist school, and they wouldn't have an Orthodox teach there. I was also the assistant pastor of that Church, so I lost two jobs at the same time. I went home temporarily, which turned into 13 years. I helped run the business when the Church approached me about becoming a priest. The business had been going well for a long time. Fr. Alexander (Atty) approached me, but before that I had asked him what this would mean, because I had planned to be a pastor in the Presbyterian Church. He said, Don't even attempt to become Orthodox for at least 10 years. So, I just did what he said. So, this is the path I was on. I did all I could to find a career, forget about my previous path and take care of my family.

The business was great for a long time, but this financial era has been very turbulent. One of the low points of this was reached when my dad, my boss at the time, came to me and said that I should come up with a back-up plan, as we might not be able to do this much longer. My natural tendency was to go back to teaching. So, I was going back to get a Master's. I mentioned it to Fr. Alexi, who had been my priest and father-confessor for the previous 10 years, and asked him what he thought about me going to get a Master's to teach theology. He asked if I had considered becoming a priest. Well, of course I had, because that was my path in my Protestant years. It wasn't until I had come to grips with the idea that it wasn't going to happen in the Orthodox Church, that the Church approached me. That began a conversation. It took my wife about six months to get on board. She had an interesting take on it. She said that I was good for this, but she didn't think she was. It was only after a conversation with Fr. Alexis and his wife that she came around. Fr. Alexis's wife Anna said that she was to be my wife and not something else. That settled her in. We also made another agreement together. We

would ask my teenage daughters. So, then I went to my teenage daughters to see what they had to say. If they put the brakes on, I wasn't going to do this. They said, Dad, you have to do this. I was shocked. I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect such a ringing endorsement.

We had to sell our home where we both had been born and raised, and figure out how to get to St. Tikhon in Nowhere, Pennsylvania. It was an exciting time. It was only two days after we sent in the application that we found out my wife was pregnant, and due on the first day of class. So we had all kinds of fun roadblocks. I would say to anyone feeling a call, that God makes it happen. Our case was impossible, especially with the baby on the way. So I contacted the school and everyone was great. Metropolitan JOSEPH had already sent his blessing, and so it had to work. If God sends roadblocks, he also sends grace to make it all work.

Seminary has been a joy. The second year is like a desert. In the first year, everything is new and there is lots of excitement. Second year is just work. In the first year, my wife would say that I was glowing, while in the second year – not so much. I have to say I have really learned a lot. The spiritual formation here is shockingly powerful. I didn't know how much it was all coming together until now. The spiritual, intellectual, psychological aspects of us are all coming together at the end of second year. I am understanding the wisdom of the three-year program and how important it is for us all to live together, bumping into each other and knocking off all the sharp edges. Some of the best things that I have learned have come from other students. I can't say a bad thing about this. It's hard, spiritually, too. That's important for a pastor. You learn that here, how to give it all to Christ. I'm still learning that. I'm sure I'll be learning that the rest of my life. How else could you learn to do this, except by learning with other people doing it?

Dr. Boosalis was here my first year and I am very thankful for him. He recognized in me some things I needed to own. He told me to dive into my background more deeply, in order to come to understand that, and witness to those from similar backgrounds. He also introduced me to St. Ephraim, who became my patron in ordination. If it were not for him, I don't think I would have known St. Ephraim. I think of Dr. Ford, and also Dr. Veniamin. All of us do; these men are the godly laymen who pray as

they teach, and still keep up the academics. They train pastors. I can throw my weight on them, and they can handle me. I can trust the process, those who sent me here, and those whom I have been entrusted to. I just took Dr. Veniamin's course, and I can't tell you how much it has transformed me.

Sayidna JOSEPH and the Archdiocese have floored me by their support. I was able to call the Archdiocese before making any decisions and have a frank and honest conversation with Fr. Tom Zain, for which I am very thankful. Had he not been so frank, honest, and truly willing to talk thorough everything, I'm not sure any of this would have happened. That is from day one. Sayidna JOSEPH and the Archdiocese have been faithful in taking care of the tuition here. For someone like me with a large family, finances are a real concern. I had a part-time job when I came here, and that has passed. The Archdiocese and other organizations within the Archdiocese have come through consistently. I've told others that the Archdiocese is going to come through. They are not going to be the barriers to you doing this. They will do everything it takes, but you are going to have to do your part. Every corner there is an obstacle, but the Archdiocese has helped me get over every one of them. My wife and I were just remarking that we can't believe it. It is unbelievable. Every time there is a need, even without asking, someone comes through for us. Other ways the Archdiocese helps is with requiring parish placements. Fifty percent of what I have learned, I have learned in the parish assignments. Yes, go to seminary and be in the laboratory, but also go to the parish and see how it works. Get experience in the altar and at the chanter's stand. It is imperative. I have had a great mentor here. All of the seminarians feel the same way about their assignments. I have gotten to know Bishop THOMAS by working in his diocese. I can't say enough about his support and what I have learned from him.

What the world needs to hear is love and acceptance. People are seeking to know who they are. Wherever they are is where they can be launched into sainthood. One of the things I learned from St. Ephraim and St. Sophrony is that our raw material becomes the substance from which we are made whole. I think the world needs to hear that. The people don't know their identity, so they don't understand the need for change. We people are raw material. We are dust destined to become gods. So,

we have some growth to do, but that growth starts from where we are today. That raw material is transformed through love. We have heard the same from others here at the school. We had Elder Ephraim of St. Peter's on Athos, and he said that too. We need to tell the world what love is. God's love is better than we can even imagine.

KARSTEN BOYER

I am a second-year student here at St. Tikhon's. I come from a family of four children. My parents were missionaries in France when I was a child.

My journey began as a college student, while I was traveling in Russia. Along the way I walked into a church, Hagia Sophia in Nogrov, and liturgy was being served. Later I had been to Vespers services when invited by friends. As I grew closer to these friends, I was invited to other services, some sad and some joyful. It was at a funeral service that I recognized how I was moved by this, and that I had to do something about it. The prayers and the depth of understanding of life expressed showed me that I needed to be fully a part of it. I started following them to the Orthodox Church, and a year later I was baptized into the Church at St. Paul, in Emmaus, by Fr. Andrew Dammick. On the way, I was also called to serve in various capacities. I was very happy to serve, though I was not always prepared. We become formed by the services themselves. We are formed in our hearts. The more that became a reality, the more I had an inclination to serve. I didn't have words for it, but it was there.

Seminary prepares us to serve in so many ways: the course work, the teachers, as well as the monastic communities and my brothers, the seminarians who have such depth of heart. It also helps to see the many different backgrounds from which people came. I didn't have that in mind when coming here. It reflects the resourcefulness of God that He chooses so many people with such great differences. This is such a joy to see. It is also a joy to see how all of the subjects dovetail with one another: patristics, history, dogmatics, liturgics. You end up understanding how it is all one piece, together with the spiritual life. It all becomes more and more profound.

I am here by the prayers and support of our Metropolitan and Archdiocese. Their help with finances

makes it possible. I also appreciate their assigning of us to our parish assignments on weekends. Those parishes also support us through their prayers, and materially, too.

My parents, and in particular, their faithfulness and depth of prayer, have been a major influence on my vocation. On the way to becoming Orthodox, several priests were very helpful to me and they have become friends. The communities, the faithful themselves, have helped to guide me. There was one person in particular who posed the question of vocation to me. I had pursued the arts and that had been the aim of my life, but I was asking a friend, Joseph Landino, for advice. He said, why not seminary? I was broadsided by that, and it changed the way I was looking. It took a few years, but it was like God wouldn't let me go. I was traveling on Mount Athos and was encouraged to bring my questions. One of them was about seminary. The elder said you need to have that joy that draws you to the altar. The joy for the services. He said also that you need to have the desire to be a father to the people. That was ambiguous to me, but later when working with the youth I came to know what he meant. So, I brought it to my priest.

The world needs to know today what it always needed to know, that God is a reality, Christ Crucified. This is a greater reality than the pursuit of material goods: a life for which we are made. People also need to know that the Church welcomes them into this. There is salvation for those who are lost, beyond what the world shows us.

"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Suffering is part of our lives. It can't be avoided, and I think the world seeks to avoid it at all costs, to the peril of their souls. There is the example of our Lord's life and those of His saints. It can't be any other way. In the Eucharist the bread is broken, and wine poured out. That is how we see Him. We give ourselves to one another and to Him. The danger of suffering is that it can be a temptation to feelings of abandonment, even though it is Christ who suffers with us.

KAMAL HURANI

I grew up in Sharon, Massachusetts, just south of Boston, the youngest of four children. I have three older sisters. We were raised in the faith by my parents, and attended St. George Church in West Roxbury. This large parish of our Archdiocese is where my parents met and where they always brought us when we were children. I am a third-year seminarian at Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts. I also did my undergraduate work there at Hellenic College, studying human development and chant for four years.

My earliest memory at St. George was running up to the front pew because my parents used to sit at the back. I was annoyed that I couldn't see anything. I got them to sit up front so that I could see what was going on. I would read along in the service book, and sing along, too. At some point I got the idea of going into the altar and serving as an altar boy, which I did for many, many years. That was an extension of my wanting to see and do more things at the liturgy. I have many memories of being in the altar, especially during Holy Week. Even though the services were long, I enjoyed being there. We also had a certain camaraderie among the altar boys.

My earliest memory of being struck by the teachings of the Church and the theology of the church was at Bible study. Fr. Nick Belcher would host Bible studies for the teens at his home, and my parents would bring us. Some of it was to prepare for the Bible Bowl, but it was a yearlong study, and we would study the text in depth. I was struck by his passion for the Scriptures and the way he talked about his teachers, Fr. Tom Hopko and others, who taught him about the faith. I was inspired to want to be able to do this and be like him. I wanted to deepen my understanding of the faith and my relationship with God.

While serving in the altar, I had an inkling that I wanted to be a priest. I was blessed to see a lot of good priests at St. George, Fr. Michael Ellias, Fr. Timothy, Fr. Nick. I had that inkling. I knew that I wanted to keep up my involvement relationship in the Church. When I saw that many of my friends got caught up with college life and drifted from the faith, I decided that Hellenic would be a good choice for me. I was able to go to Church daily on campus, as I did at camp. I didn't go with

the idea that I would immediately go to seminary afterwards. I started to develop some doubts and didn't feel the calling the way I did as a young boy. I decided to take a year off after college to think more deeply about a call. I found that the calling was strong again, and I came back to the campus to study for service to the Church again.

My time at Holy Cross has been powerful and beautiful. This has been so despite the pandemic, during which I had my first year fully online. My professors rose to the challenge, and the on-line classes were very nourishing. I was able to do more of my readings, because there were no on-campus responsibilities. I studied more that year than any year in college. Because Holy Cross is such a small community, you can really get to know your professors and they you. You can tell that they know you individually, and that they care for you personally. I had a lot of great professors, and their passion came through, even over Zoom. Dr. Ann Bezzerides taught Youth Ministry, Fr. Maximos taught Patrology, and Fr. Harry Papas instructed us in the Old Testament, so I was really blessed to have those classes my first year. In my second year we were back on campus, and that has been nice. To have time together, worship, and sing together, and to have that camaraderie again, all those things that I had already had in college, was refreshing. Then the challenge came back of balancing time for campus life and time for study. That was a new struggle that I was not expecting this year. Again, though, I could see the passion that my professors had and the care that they had for me. This was a safe space to grow and to devote oneself as an individual and as part of a community.

My parish assignment has been St. George in Norwood, which is the closest to my house, even though we did not grow up there. I had known Fr. Joseph Kimmet through Teen SOYO and learned much there from him. St. George, Norwood, is a smaller community, but very active and strong in its community ties. We have developed a nice camaraderie among the young adults there. It has also been nice for me not to be in charge of anything. This has taken a lot of pressure off and allowed me to serve without any ego. They already have others in charge of the chant stand and choir. This has been great for me, learning to serve with these pious people, and learning from Fr. Joe: how he does things, and how other parishes function. Growing up my whole life

in one parish didn't give me much sense of what other parishes did, what was different and what was the same. I learned not just from Fr. Joe, but from everyone in the parish.

I think that those outside of the church must know, deep down, that there is something missing from their lives. Deep down they know that something is not sitting right. They are sensing the void that God alone can fill. Each of us has that innate human spark that God gave us to recognize our Creator, even when we have fallen out of our relationship with Him. It falls on each of us to help others, not by telling them what they are doing wrong – they already know that – but by showing them how to awaken and respond to that uncomfortable feeling and direct their energy toward Christ. Christ is where our energies and desires should lay. Church is ultimately where we will find rest and peace. We can see that the world is not at peace, and the world knows it is not at peace. It is our job to guide people and introduce them to Christ.

IOANA POPA, MD, BCC

I am a parishioner at St. Mary Antiochian Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I live in Southern New Hampshire with my husband Sabastian Falardeau, who is a full-time hospital chaplain. I've worn many 'hats' in my life in an attempt to serve God and find my vocation in Christ: I've worked as a physician-psychiatrist, therapist, adjunct professor, teacher, life coach, counselor, and spiritual care provider.

I have been associated with Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline Massachusetts for many years. I taught at the College and counseled students and faculty in the Spiritual Formation and Counseling Office. In 2015 I decided to study theology at the seminary part time, and with God's help I finished in 2022. It has been an amazing journey discovering and really learning about our faith.

Although I am cradle Orthodox, in the first decades of my life I didn't have much contact with the Church, because I lived in Romania, a Communist country at the time. When I discovered our faith, I went to services all the time and I learned through reading the Bible and my experiences in the Church. Reading from St. Basil's life I was inspired to become more serious about my faith and

our theology; therefore I enrolled in the Master's program.

Studying Orthodox Theology brought my faith to a deeper level, and I gained confidence in talking about it and in discerning the kernels of truth in our faith that I could bring forth in my ministry.

How did you manage being a teacher, counselor, and fellow student, on a small campus at the same time?

My training as a physician and counselor helped me have clear boundaries as I encountered and worked with various people at the seminary in the many roles. And at the same time, I held all interactions with love and respect, as we are all members of the same Orthodox family. We share common experiences of God and Church and ultimately, as we relate to each other, it is God who is doing the work. It was fun and beneficial to be and work with fellow



students and faculty and we all gained and learned from each other. We had the strong sense that we were building a strong church community together.

Did anything surprise you during your time at the seminary?

I didn't expect the depth of thought taught at the seminary. We went beyond the rules and customs, in order to deal with the actual freedom that Orthodox Theology brings. As one of my professors often said, Orthodox Theology represents unity in diversity. At the same time, Orthodoxy is preserving uninterruptedly, the threads of faith from our past, while encouraging us to live in the present moment with fullness and without compromising the freedom of thought.

For me, the seminary training has been inspiring,

formational, and mind blowing! In my experience as a physician and life coach (and so many other trainings) I found no other system of thought and belief so profound, systematic, cosmic and full of hope.

What role did your parish or Dioceses/Archdiocese play in your training?

I was inspired by my pastor, Fr. Antony Hughes at St. Mary's church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who encouraged our creativity at a parish council meeting by saying something like: "I can't do everything. Everyone in the parish should come and bring creativity and ideas. We are a community." This comment inspired me to study and also to begin our diocese's Witness to Christ Program.

SARAH BUNE MARTELI

I am a board-certified palliative care chaplain and bereavement coordinator. Currently I work at Massachusetts General Hospital here in Boston. I'm a member here at St. Mary's with my husband Peter Marteli and our seven-year-old son Raphael. I was received into the Orthodox Church 20 years ago and I have been working as a chaplain and bereavement coordinator for 19 years, half-time as an in-home chaplain, and half-time in acute care.

I did my Master of Divinity program at Harvard when I was Presbyterian. Following that, I did Clinical Pastoral Education and at that time lived in a different city and belonged to an OCA church. I received an endorsement from the OCA at that time to work as a certified chaplain. When I got my current job, my endorsement came from Metropolitan JOSEPH. I recently completed a Doctor of Ministry program from St. Vladimir's Seminary. The Doctor of Ministry program is designed for people who have been in ministry for 5 or 10 years. I had a cohort of wonderful colleagues from a variety of jurisdictions: one is a priest from Finland, another is a deacon, another is a Coptic Orthodox. The D. Min. program gave me some formal Orthodox theological education, which I had not really had, and an opportunity to integrate it in our daily work. We looked at Liturgical Theology, Scripture, and early Patristic Writings to examine what I was doing in the hospital. It was incredibly nourishing to me. There is a course in ministry to the sick and dying, and, you know, I thought, well, I have been doing this for 19 years, but I was now seeing it with new eyes. The program was enriching and allowed

me to do some writing and reading that I had never had the opportunity to do. Though it was a lot of work, reading and writing, it was an opportunity to be nourished and reinvigorated.

Chaplaincy is a growing ministry, and many people are called to it. There are priests, deacons, lay men and lay women. I was talking to a friend who is a priest about it 20 years ago when it was a small ministry. People have been taking care of the sick and dying forever. My priest friend asked, is the ministry building up the body of Christ? Is it building up the Church? My answer is Yes. We are building up the Church, because we are witnessing to the church members and supporting God's people. Priests have called upon me over the years to visit their patients. Although my work is to minister to people of many faiths, when I visit Orthodox Christians, I am free to share our common understandings and truths. I can pray our Orthodox prayers with them, bring them icons, and particularly when we face end of life, I can share what the Orthodox say about death, and eternal life. I help people process their experience in ways that are consistent with our beliefs. Today, we chaplains have a rather large sub-group of the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology and Religion that I write a newsletter for. We meet annually at the Conference.

I have a book coming out this summer from Ancient Faith called *Memory Eternal*. It is based on the work I did for my Doctor of Ministry research project. We each were required to do research on something that interested us, and I have always been interested in grief and bereavement. People have asked me for grief resources over the years. There are many secular resources, but not many Orthodox materials that integrate the best practices of modern times with the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Church. I reflected on the work that I did at the seminary, and then interviewed grieving Orthodox Christians. I did a theological reflection and a liturgical reflection and then wrote an eight-week bereavement curriculum for use in parishes. So again, very practical. What does the Church need? What do people need? What are the gifts that we can use to help people? Anyone who has a call to be a listener can lead these groups. You only need to be a compassionate person to be able to support people and lead these groups.

What surprised me at seminary was how at

home I was there. Everyone in the group was a priest, except for one lay man who is a missionary, and me. I was the first woman in this Doctor of Ministry program, and I wondered if this would be a problem. It was not. I was treated by everyone as a peer, and everyone was so dedicated to the ministry. We had such a diversity of gifts. We all brought different ways of ministering to people. We all grew and gained from each other. I mentioned before the class on ministering to the sick and dying. I went to it skeptically, thinking that I had been in this field for 19 years, but still I gained so much. We can all keep learning. Even texts that I read 20 years ago, like Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, felt like it was new to me. After years of ministering, this book hit me in such a different way. Within our cohort there was also such a diversity of opinions and approaches. We were able to challenge each other and question each other in a brave, honest way. This was always done through a lens of our common faith and understanding.

The world needs a lot of things. From my lens I would say we Christians need to be brave and step out and witness. We need to be a prophetic voice in the midst of all the current suffering, and to love

one another, and to serve each other. We need to talk openly about grief and suffering and loss. We have such a different perspective on life and death: Christ trampling down death by His death. These truths can help us be brave in talking about suffering and illness. WE can draw on this when people are so lost and afraid, and give them hope and comfort. We need to share our tradition.

God is with us through every experience, loss and fear. Our worship and the witness of the Theotokos as she lost her Son, allow us not to be afraid, but honest. We can weep and lament with people without losing hope, or the sight of God with us. We can share with each other. We proclaim as Orthodox, Christ crucified and resurrected, yet there are still other things that we don't understand. It is good to admit that we don't understand everything, and still, we know God is close to us and allows us to live as fully as we can.

When I see Orthodox patients, I ask them what they are praying for, and then I am better able to understand them and be with them. The patients can encourage us by their witness and relationship with God. It is such an intimate opportunity to join with them in their prayer.



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REFLECTIONS ON THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS SPORTS CAMP



Glory to God! In August of 2021, North American Committee (NAC) Teen SOYO sponsored its 41st year of Sports Camp with Special Olympics Pennsylvania. This year was special, in that our teens got to return as coaches after a two-year hiatus.

Those who have not had the chance to witness Sports Camp in person may not fully understand the true ministry and self-emptying love it draws from its coaches and participants. We hope the reflections from the SOYO coaches below will give a small glimpse into the joy and insights our young people gain through this event.

We thank you for your continued monetary support of this ministry and invite you to join us as coaches and volunteers next August! For more information, or to make a donation online, please visit www.teensoyo.org/special-olympics.

In Christ,
Fr. Philip Rogers and Erin Ghata, Archdiocese
Youth Ministry Chairs

Spending a week at the Antiochian Village as a SOYO coach for Special Olympics was a life-changing experience. Although some of the athletes might not even have been Christian, they taught me so much about what it means to live like Christ. They were never shy to express their love for the coaches and other athletes, which went beyond their words. The athletes always cheered and encouraged each other during sports practice and games; their positivity and joy were overwhelmingly contagious. They never worried about what the future might

hold, or what people might think of them. The athletes had a childlike innocence that reminded me of Matthew 18:3. We've become accustomed to hiding who we are, the "fearfully and wonderfully made" people God created, because we often fear how others will perceive us. These athletes, however, reminded me that we are all made in the image of God and that we shouldn't be worried about the opinions of others. For example, one evening we had karaoke night, where I quickly learned that the athletes were not afraid to be themselves. The music started and they danced like their life depended on it, not focusing on anything except the rhythm and their dance moves. They also never shied away from meeting new people, as they would often introduce themselves and talk like we'd been friends for years. I left camp realizing that this is what God desires for all of us. He wants us to love Him and His children, uplifting one another and focusing on truthful, pure, and lovely things. It also became a week where I met some of the kindest, bravest, most loving people, from the SOPA coaches I worked with, to the athletes I trained and the SOYOs with whom I formed a lasting bond. I went to the Village with the intention of offering my time and attention to the athletes, but they gave me more than I could ever offer them. My week at Special Olympics was one that I'll never forget.

– Danielle Semine, St. George, Houston, Texas
My time at the Special Olympics Sports Camp of Pennsylvania was one that I will never forget. As I boarded the bus to the Antiochian Village, I immediately became friends with my fellow SOYO coaches. We created a bond that helped us throughout the week as we worked as a team. Once the athletes started to arrive, all of my nervousness left me and I immediately knew that the upcoming week would be one that would influence me for the rest of my life. My favorite thing about the whole week was watching the athletes show unconditional love, sportsmanship and kindness to everyone they came into contact with. As we learned new skills

every day, the athletes continuously found ways to push and lead their peers if they saw them struggling or needing encouragement. While challenges presented themselves throughout the week, the SOYO coaches found their strength in each other and through God; the challenges only helped us grow in the faith and grow our community at Special Olympics. A quote from St. Paisios that came to mind on how the coaches had to treat the week is, “Completely have trust in God, leave everything in His hands, and believe that His love will act for your own benefit. Then God will take care of everything, because there is nothing he cannot do; everything is easy for Him. The difficult thing is for man to decide to humble himself and leave everything to God’s providence and love.”

– Julie Williams, St. Elijah, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Serving as a SOYO Special Olympics Coach was simultaneously the most challenging and rewarding week of my entire life. On arrival day, my heart fluttered in anticipation and nervousness, and a myriad of thoughts ran the track of my mind. What will the athletes be like? What will they think of me? I wondered. As soon as the first bus of athletes arrived, however, I was swept up into the excited chatter and delight of the crowd and my nervousness dissipated. Throughout the week I not only grew to know and love the four athletes in my own cabin, but I also enjoyed playing bocce ball every morning with the athletes who played that primary sport, and helping to lead one of the color groups for afternoon sports rotations. As the week progressed, I realized how much insight the athletes had and how much I could learn simply by spending time with them. They loved everyone unconditionally, and they were transparent and honest in their friendships. If they needed help, they asked. If they saw someone crying or upset, they comforted each one without hesitation. If there was a misunderstanding or disagreement, they talked through their differences of opinion without judgment and created compromises. In a world where there we feel societal pressure to put on a persona of perfection, it was a blessing to be in a community where people acted as their real selves, imperfections and all.

– Grace Wagner, St. Mary, Hunt Valley, Maryland

My time at the Special Olympics of Pennsylvania Sports Camp was truly life-changing. All

the other SOYO members and I quickly became good friends. Seeing how unashamedly the athletes loved was a really beautiful thing. While there, I really came out of my shell, and would dance and sing without worrying about what people thought. I loved my cabin and had a great time with all of them. It was hard work, but it was really fun. I was



nervous at the beginning but then the athletes came and everything just melted away and I was at peace. All in all, it was a really good experience that I think would be beneficial for anyone.

– Aidan Pendergraft, St. Elijah, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



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The Children's Relief Fund



I greet you on behalf of all the children of the **Children's Relief Fund (CRF)**, past and present. We pray that you receive this letter in their gratitude and appreciation for the love and concern you have shown them in our Lord's name. We pray for your continued health and prosperity in this New Year.

This letter brings you our *"2022 New Year Appeal."* The purpose of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is to provide funds for the children in need in Lebanon and Palestine, and the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The **CRF**, under the *"Department of Charitable Outreach,"* has been a godsend to hundreds of needy children and their families. We are so proud and privileged to help and support them financially – but more importantly, to show them our love and concern.

We will continue to assist these children, just as we have since the Fund's inception in 1983. We have provided close to **4 million dollars** in aid, but we can't do it alone. Your past participation has brought much joy to so many young suffering innocents. ***100% of your donation goes directly to the sponsored child and no money is used for administrative services.***

You can help change the life of a child by being a sponsor for as little as \$400 a year, just \$7.69 per week, \$1.10 per day. Donations in any amount are always welcome. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you their name, age, address, and a brief biography. Your child will correspond with you, sending you letters and pictures about their life. You will be able to develop a special bond and personal relationship with them.

Your assistance will improve the lives of these children and give them a chance for a better future.

For those of you who are already sponsoring a child, we



offer you our most profound thanks. Please continue your love and support. New sponsors are encouraged to open a window of concern and join this humanitarian effort to lift the burden off these children.

In anticipation of your kind response, we thank you for your generosity, and pray you enjoy the New Year with health, happiness, and prosperity. May God bless you and yours and give you strength in the coming days.

Deborah Brown
CRF Administrator
(917) 991-7192

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