Encounter God Through the People of His Church and In Doing His Will

hat does it take to keep the Church doors open, or, probably more important, what does it take to fulfill our Christian responsi-
bility? Keeping our doors open is not enough. We are to bring Christ to His world and offer this world back to God. Such a commission requires more than mini-
malist ways of thinking. It takes all of our hearts, all of our minds, and all of our souls. Rather than asking what is the least we can get away with, we need to dream together about serving God and saving His people. We need to develop a clear vision of what brings the world to God is all about. We need to express God’s saving action in real time and in tangible, understandable and relational ways. This is what it means to be in the Church, the Church which is apos-
totic and established by God for the life of the world.

Researchers have reported that for the first time in American history, there is no longer a correlation between church attendance and contributions to the church or support of it. Churches that are full sometimes have smaller receipts than those with few people in the pews. What is behind such a finding is a new understanding of membership. People who consider themselves members of a church may not translate their idea of church membership to church attendance, work in the church or support. While some members come to church but don’t contribute or support the church, others contribute, but absent themselves from worship. Church life has changed dramatically in the last two decades. Understanding of the nature of the church has changed. This is true in the Orthodox Church as well. Church leadership would do well to understand what the members are thinking and how they behave as a result. An understand-
ing of how our Orthodox Church members are thinking and how they are influenced by those around us will make us pastors better able to teach what is true and wholesome.

The Church provides us with opportunities to serve God and the world that He created and calls home. The Church is mystical, inasmuch as God Himself touches us and ministers to us through this body established by Him, a body that, like Christ, is both divine and human. Through human bishops, pastors, and faithful laity, God works, heals, witnesses and saves. Through real people gathered in His name and worshipping in correct (Orthodox) ways, God reveals Himself and sanctifies our space, our time, our selves. God is in His Church and His Church is in Him. God works through His Church.

We cannot be Christian without the Church that chrusi- mates and Christianizes us. As Christians, we do not act in isolation or follow our own will. Christians from the time of the disciples submit themselves to God and to each other, and are sent by the Church. This ba-
ing sent and being responsible the Church protects us from self-delusion and egocentrism. We are all em-
powered and directed by Christ through His Church. Every generation from the time of Christ has witnessed continuously and consistently to the Word of God who took on flesh, taught us, suffered for us and died a hor-
rible death for us. This He did, so that He could rise for us and open for us a way to live in Christ.

The Church gives us opportunities to meet God through worship, study and prayerful support. We then share with the world on behalf of our Church our own witness to Christ, and then share God’s own com-
The Church protects us from self-delusion and egocentrism. This being sent by the Church. This being sent and being responsible to the Church as lived within the Patriarchate of Antioch from St. Peter and Paul until today. Likewise, Metropolitan JOSEPH serves as our source and connection to the Apostolic Church that we are today in North America. The Church is a Church that puts flesh on God’s word and love. Let us share Christ with the countries of North America in which we live and that we love. Let us witness to each other, sowing and reaping generously, not minimally.

We cannot be Christian without the Church that chrismates and Christianizes us. As Christians, we do not act in isolation and Christianizes us. As Christians, we do not act in isolation and in our own will. Christians from the time of the disciples submit themselves to God and to each other, and are sent by the Church. This being sent and being responsible to the Church protects us from self-delusion and egocentrism.

The theme of this Symposium, “For the sick and the suffering …: MEDICINE, THEOLOGY, HEALING,” lies at the epicenter of Pastoral Theology. It involves various terms, sometimes used interchangeably: pastoral care, pastoral ministry, pastoral praxis, and so forth. Each of these terms – at least for the Orthodox Christian – is related to the more global understanding of ministry and theology.

Ministry and theology, in turn, are Pastoral Theology, and for us in Church leadership, who seek to be agents of healing in that ministry, we must know in what kind of “healing” we participate. Therefore the question before us in this Symposium is, What do we as Orthodox Christians mean when we use the term “healing”? By extension, we should ask, How are our ministry and theology related to that understanding of healing?

From the beginning, we must realize a certain tension is needed: we direct others entrusted by God to our care, both within the Apostolic Tradition, and with the proper use of the contemporary resources available to us – sociological, anthropological, psychological and physiological. To lose this tension is to limit our capacity as agents of healing. We need both: the Apostolic Tradition and contemporary resources.

With this in mind, let us focus on three topics:

1. The Use of Medical Language in the Life of the Church
2. The need for reconciliation through appropriation, and
3. The place of the spiritual director and guide as the agent of healing.

1. The Use of Medical Language in the Life of the Church

We can begin by understanding the medical term so often used by the Church Fathers for the praxis (practice) of this ministry: “The Spiritual Physician” (Μητροπολίτης). St. Gregory Nazianzen in his Flight to Pontos calls the praxis of this Spiritual Physician “the art of arts, and the science of science,”1 and St. Gregory of Rome, in his Pastoral Rule I,1 claims this same healing praxis is “the art of arts.”2

Students of ministry and theology, that is, of pastoral theology, will quickly realize that this praxis has as its paradigm and pattern the ministry of the “Elder,”3 or “Abba” in the Semitic, “Geron” in the Greek; “Elder” and “Abba” are used by the Church Fathers for the praxis (praxis) of this ministry: “The Spiritual Physician” (Μητροπολίτης). St. Anthony of Egypt thus says, “The fathers of old went into the desert, and so forth. Each of these terms – at least for the Orthodox Christian – is related to the more global understanding of ministry and theology.
and when they were made ‘whole,’ they became ‘physicians,’ and returning again they made others whole; therefore it is said, ‘Physician heal thyself.’ Abba Apollo, in the same source, is quoted as stating that when a spiritual father asks questions in order to guide and direct a faithful person, he is like a ‘wise physician.’ In the Slavic tradition, St. John of Kronsstadt uses this same term, now directly relative to the Father-Confessor, ‘a spiritual physician to whom one can show his wounds without shame … trusting and confiding in him.’ And finally, looking still deeper, we find that the usage of this term was already rooted in the ancient philosophers. For example, Socrates saw himself as the ‘sage’ who was the ἤγιός οὗτος ἐστίν, the ‘soul healer’ or ‘physician of the soul.’

The use of medical language in such literature therefore leads us to a deeper level of care and healing; it is the first focus in the exploration of Pastoral Theology and Healing.

2. The Need for Reconciliation Through Appropriation

Considering our second topic, we note the critical need for appropriation relative to reconciliation, that is, relative to healing and ministry. We must learn to make our care appropriate to the case that lies before us if we want healing to occur. For example, it would be naïve for anyone today in service to the church to pretend that new things are not constantly being added to our list of gifts. For example, the gift of teaching, the gift of ministry – in whatever form it takes – of the Spiritual Director – in whatever form it takes – is that the appropriation and application of this variety of gifts is at the heart of all our theological praxis.

3. The Place of the Spiritual Director and Guide

The third mode of ministry, the practice of Spiritual Direction and Guidance, is even more personal, and demands even more careful appropriation. This third mode is best understood by looking at its major concerns, and the connection of faith to healing is the first concern to consider. "In what ways are we to understand the linkage of faith and healing?"

Let us begin with the Scripture. In the New Testament one author has found sixteen instances of deliverance from disease and demonic possession, and over forty of deliverance from physical death. The point, however, is that the healing of each somatic disease and alleviation of suffering in the Scripture is related to the presence of God in Christ, and deliverance by Him, and to the healing of all of life through the restoration of the cosmos. That is, it is related to the ultimate meaning of life. Again, in the New Testament the connection is at once causal and symbolic. Thus Jesus sends His disciples "to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:2). Note: we see "to preach" and "to heal" in the same sentence!

For the purposes of our Symposium, however, we ask: How can we interpret such a connection for our contemporary ministry, and, in particular, for the work of the Spiritual Director – in whatever form it takes – in today’s world? To begin with, we must make some observations about this connection of faith and healing, so that we are not trapped in "magic" and misunderstanding:

A. As has been said, the healing actions of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Logos, manifest the Kingdom of God in our midst, and the connection is obvious.

B. All healing can be causally and symbolically linked with the act of God, even though mediated through human resources and elements, such as doctors and medicines. Suffering and disease, unlike healing, however, cannot easily be seen as the act of God in particular instances. "Sin and death" and their relation are indeed the heart of the theological matter, but the relation can best be understood as universal, that is, applying to humankind in general. We recognize that sin and disorder have broken in upon the world. One would not say, "You have cancer because you’ve done something wrong!" If we were to state such a direct, causal relation between sin and disease, would we not be like Job’s friend, who said, "Whoever perisheth, being innocent?" (Job 4:7)? In other words, he was saying, "Job, you must have done something wrong, something evil!" We can well understand Job’s whine: "You are all physicians of no value!" (13:4).

C. Faith is no guarantee of our somatic healing, nor does it promise to be. Nor is faith dependant upon our healing, or the cessation of suffering. Indeed, one may suffer more because of his faith. Were we to be relieved of such suffering, then Christ, the martyrs, and all those "made perfect in faith," as we say in the Anaphora, would not themselves have suffered. For the Christian, it may be a case of "Shall I suffer or not," but "How shall I suffer when it is given to me?"

D. Disease comes to man because, as St. John Chrysostom aptly notes, everything is liable to its connotative evil and malady. (For example, com is susceptible to mildew, wood to rot, and the body to disease.) Here sin as disease and death enter in the causal sense! A disorder proper to man is touched by an outside evil, like spoiled or poisoned food touching that part of the body that will respond to that spoiled food. One’s soul, however, if it is exempt from evil, cannot be affected by an outside evil. In other words, Chrysostom says, we can do something about what is in us. Here enters the patristic insistence on the σωτηρία – ἄγιον (virtue). Chrysostom aptly notes, everything is liable to its connatural sin as disease and death enter in the causal sense!

E. Pain, as C. S. Lewis well notes, is a "megaphone of God!" When I am in pain, my brain tells me that something is wrong, and I scream. In a larger sense,
The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian gives us a lead, as it reminds us that every person has a way of seeing himself in relation to others, a “self-image.”

“Who am I?” in relationship to God, other humans, the world? This self-image includes our understanding of ourselves. What is our role, our capacity, our direction? No one should pretend that this self-image is not important: threats to our self-image are threats to our very being. Whether or not this should be the case, it is a fact. Our being itself includes our self-image, our self-interpretation. St. Ephraim, in this sense, is asking us to look at ourselves precisely.

As we do that, we learn that one of the most important things that could happen when a person comes to the pastor for spiritual direction is that he is getting his self-image out before himself. Thereby he sees it for what it truly is: self-interpretation through other-interpretation. This is known in the Desert Literature as therapia Theon, the “Therapy of God.” What is false and sinful in our self-image? What is grandiose, proud? Where is the discrepancy between what we are and what we pretend to be? Then again, when do we slothfully become “satisfied,” forgetting that we are never totally defined by what we are, but by what we desire to become?

Here the role of the pastor as Father-Confessor and Spiritual Guide is obvious. He is someone I trust, to whom I can disclose my “self” with all my sins. Of all things, he represents God and the Church! When we talk with him (and we do not mean here only in the sacrament of Confession, or the mystery of repentance, which can begin this talk, but not limit it), we can hear what we are saying. Furthermore, he can help us to interpret what we are really saying. What “idols” have we created in order to avoid coming to grips with ourselves? What “idols” have we created that keep us from the painful truth about what is required for us to “cooperate” with God (synergia)?

What is needed for healing in each case is a re-ordering of our self-image — and it must be a constant re-ordering. This very personal relationship and communion with a Father-Confessor can release a person and lead to such healing.

Conclusion: Congruence and the Failures to Cure

In the end, the only thing that heals is God’s grace, and that is the case even if we are not cured. In light of this truth, there are two concluding observations to be made: the “congruence” of the pastor as he appropriates God’s healing grace, and the issue of failure to cure. In all cases, he who seeks to be an agent of healing must reflect what God Himself has done for us.

First, we must project what the kerygma proclaims: Deus pro nobis, God for us! Each act of the pastor-in-relationship implicitly bears what the kerygma explicitly declares: God is with us!

An important aspect of our reflecting God’s concern and healing is that of congruence. God does not cease to be Himself while sharing in human existence. God continues to be at one with Himself, being “He who is.” He never loses His inner unity and integrity. This is the divine congruence. The Spiritual Director reflects this truth in his own dealings as he relates to the suffering and sin of another, remaining who he is.

The person entrusted to his care must sense the inner congruence of the Director. He must know that he is in the presence of one who is in touch with himself and his own life, even as he encounters the other’s estrangement. Being in the presence of a congruent person — one who is who he is, and knows who he is — undoubtedly has the potential for healing. The congruent person can be a “handle” onto which I can hold. He can be the otherness that I need. He can remain separate and not so identified with me so as to lose that self-congruence.

The pastor does not, and should not, embody fear to share another’s fear, but must learn to share the experience, that is, to “co-suffer,” yet remain distinctively himself as “other.” Though participating, he never negates his own identity. This paradigm, as we saw, is learned in the meaning of God’s incarnation in Christ; God “healed” us by becoming man (vvere homo), but also because He remained God (vvere Deus).

We may — and often will — fail to heal, that is, cure, but we must insist that, in our all-too-human failings, God may still heal. When we fail, then, we can again turn to hope for the example of Job. Job’s pleasings are like a theorem: he is innocent and struck down with misfortune and illness. The Almighty God does not answer his plea for a cure. Is God unjust?

An upright and God-fearing man, Job has lost everything: his cattle and asses, his servants and camels, and then his sons and daughters. As if that is not enough, he falls sick with “sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown” (2:7). And then comes the sarcasm of his wife and “curious” friends. “You are so miserable, Job, why do you not just curse God and die.” Get out of your misery!” As we hear God’s voice, however, another deeper meaning comes: God says to Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:41). Besides the mystery of God’s creative work, Job now discovers his own humanity, and remembers that “man is born into trouble” (5:7) — neither taken out of the world, nor removed from contact with disease and evil, but greeted at that very point with God’s care. For the Christian, God’s care is demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, which leads to the Cross and Resurrection. Could not our response to the human failure to cure, then, be like that of Job: “Behold, I am small account, what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand upon my mouth!” (Job 40:4–7).

When we arrive at this point, we are “healed,” even if we are not cured. 

The Very Rev. Joseph J. Allen, Th.D. St. Anthony’s Antiochian Orthodox Church Director of Theological and Pastoral Education

NOTES:
4 The Spiritual Counsel of Father John Kronstadt, New York: ISVP, 192.
Baptism and Eucharist: Sacraments of Healing

Paul Meyendorf

Healing lies at the very center of the Church’s ministry. Even a quick review of Scripture and early Christian writings makes this clear, and there is no rite or sacrament which does not contain some reference to healing. We have but to listen to the Sunday gospel readings or hear the words of liturgical prayers to realize just how frequently the theme recurs. Thus the specific rite of healing, the “Anointing of the Sick,” is but one small aspect of this ministry.

The very purpose of the Church is to heal us, to overcome the rift between God and humanity which is caused by our sin and leads to death. This is achieved precisely when we are united to one another and to God in the Body of Christ, which is the Church. In His high-priestly prayer, our Lord prays for all His followers, that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be in Me, and I in You, that they may be one even as We are one, I in You, that You have sent Me and have loved them perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved Me, even as You have loved Me (John 17:21–23). In Baptism, Christians abandon their old life, in which they were under the sway of sin and death, and enter into a new life, where sin and death have been defeated. In Baptism, we enter into a new relationship with God, with Christ, in which sin, sickness, and death no longer dominate. We become children of God, heirs of the Kingdom, members of Christ’s body, the Church. This new relationship is to endure forever, and neither sickness nor death can destroy it. Baptism, therefore, is the sacrament of healing pur excellence, a healing aimed at the whole person, body, soul, and spirit.

Baptism, therefore, is the paradigmatic healing sacrament. Fallen humanity is recreated; our sins are forgiven; the image of God in us is restored; real, intimate communion with God, destroyed because of sin, is again made possible. The sickness and death which once ruled our lives are defeated, in the sense that they, just like the cross, become a means of victory and a passage into the Kingdom. The brokenness of our human existence is abolished as we are incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, through which we are saved. We are no longer left to live out our lives alone, to suffer and die a meaningless death. Rather, in the Church, our suffering and death become a means to victory, following in the footsteps of Christ, His death on the cross and His resurrection. Through Baptism, we are healed, and we are charged to bring this healing ministry to the world around us: to our family, to our neighbor, to all whom we encounter.

While Baptism and Chrismation are the means by which we become members of the Church, the Body of Christ, the Eucharist is the means by which this membership is realized and continues to be lived out. In fact, all the sacraments of the Church, as well as the daily and weekly cycles of prayer, have the Eucharist as their goal. We are the Church precisely when we gather together, Sunday after Sunday, to celebrate the mystery of Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection on our behalf. In the Eucharist, we not only remember these events, but we become partakers of Christ, sharing in His divine nature “for the healing of soul and body.” It is precisely in the Eucharist that the famous fourth-century dictum of St. Athanasius is realized: “God became man, so that man might become god.” This is the basis for the Orthodox teaching about divinization, or theosis.

Humanity is created to be in communion with God, and the Eucharist is the realization of this communion. True healing is precisely the restoration of communion with God, the restoration of the proper relationship between God and humanity. Every time that we receive communion, we receive this grace of healing. As with Baptism, this healing affects the entire person, with salvation, our entrance into the Kingdom, as its ultimate goal.

1. On the Incarnation, 54
So Much More: Reflecting the Unceasing Worship of the Heavenly Hosts

Daniel L. Merchant

Music played an important role in my life and in my journey into Orthodoxy. Having grown up in various evangelical Protestant denominations, I have seen almost every style of music imaginable used in churches: from classical music and traditional hymns, to country music, and even rock and roll, complete with smoke machines and flashing strobe lights.

My first exposure to the music of the Orthodox Church came when I was a teenager. A family friend who had recently converted to Orthodoxy invited us to a concert. My father and I went, even though at the time, I had very little interest. I didn’t think the music would be “relevant” or “speak to me.” After all, it was just a small choir from some Russian monastery called Valaam. (I had no reason to really know or understand what that was.)

From the moment the choir started singing, I found myself transported to a different place. I couldn’t explain it at the time, but there was something special about the music I heard that night, and I will never forget that experience.

Several years later, while a student at Liberty University (the world’s largest evangelical Christian university), I found myself attending a weekday Matins service at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. At this point my wife and I were still evangelical Protestants. We were struck by the beauty and reverence of the services and found in them a fulfillment of what we had been searching for our entire lives. After Matins, we went to a required weekday chapel service at the University. The difference was day and night. The lack of order, beauty, and reverence, stood in stark contrast to what we had just experienced at the Orthodox Church. That experience did much to hasten our journey towards Orthodoxy.

What I gained from the Byzantine Musicology program was not just the ability to chant and to read Byzantine neumatic notation, but also an understanding of my previous experiences. As an evangelical Protestant, I had no developed “philosophy of music.” I viewed music as a fundamentally neutral medium, used only to accompany the text of a song and attract the listener. Having seen the true light and having found the true faith, I have now come to understand that the music of the Church’s worship is capable of so much more. It can affect the emotional and spiritual state of a person, bringing him or her into an attitude of reverent worship. Further, it can reflect to the Church the unceasing worship of the heavenly hosts and elevate the worshipper into heaven itself. Finally, its beauty can transmit the glory of the Divine to those who await His great and rich mercy.

The Musicology program proved to be challenging. In the first place, I came to the program from a small Western Rite mission, so I did not have much formal experience with vocal music. So in addition to learning the Byzantine notation, I was still learning about Byzantine chant itself, and even about vocal technique. It took a lot of hard work, but, through the patience of my instructors, Fr. Elias Bitar and Stratos Mandalakis, and the grace of God, I was able to learn and to grow.

I would recommend this program to those who have an interest in learning more about Byzantine chant and Byzantine notation and have some previous musical experience. I would especially recommend it for those who chant in their parishes. I would like to thank all the faculty for the knowledge and wisdom they have shared over the course of my studies. I will truly miss the opportunity to study with such great men of God.
I have been afforded the honor of sharing a few thoughts as a representative of those who are graduating from the “Applied Theology” program this week. I hope to reflect concisely on some of the principles and themes, and I hope that you, my colleagues, find them to be consistent with your experience as a student.

I have now been here for two consecutive weeks, so I begin by asking forgiveness of those who have been stuck with me this whole time – please forgive me for any and all offenses. It has been a joy to be with you; I hope that in some way I have conveyed the love of Christ to you, as you have to me.

Next I would like to express gratitude: thank you to our administrators (Fr. Joseph, Archdeacon Peter, Cherri, and Mary), to our most capable instructors, and to the Antiochian Village staff. Thank you to our fathers in Christ, Sayidna JOHN, Sayidna NICHOLAS – and Sayidna THOMAS (who was here last week) – thank you for your loving leadership and living example of “applied theology.” It has been a gift to us that we could spend time with you, to get to know you personally.

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

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

We have learned that experience is a prerequisite to leadership. We cannot lead others where we ourselves have not been. Some entry into the mystery of the Holy Trinity is necessary; it is necessary that one has embarked on the healing journey of salvation. So, by the grace of God – which is His very presence in our lives – may we become effective workers in the vineyard.

I will conclude with a couple of quotations. In the beautiful words of Fr. Joseph Antypas, “Our goal is not to harvest, but to sow.” In the words of our Metropolitan JOSEPH: “If you desire to grow in your relationship with God, fall on your knees in repentance, then stand up and get to work: we have much to do.”
After being asked to speak, I began reflecting on my journey and asked some of my classmates for their own reflections.

We all have come here from different backgrounds, with different intentions, but we share a common goal. St. John Cassian says our ultimate goal is the Kingdom of God, and our immediate goal is purity of heart.

Some here tonight are on the path to the priesthood; some will be ordained deacons or sub-deacons; some are here to become better equipped in lay ministries in the Church. Some of us have grown up in the Church; others like myself are converts who have finally found our home in the Orthodox Church. Some here tonight are inquiring into the Orthodox faith. Still, the goal is the same: purity of heart and the Kingdom of God.

We have been encouraged along this path by our teachers and mentors. Your Graces and Reverend Clergy, you have led us on this path through your love and example. We have struggled through our readings, writing papers and completing the projects. We have been encouraged and taught and have grown to love each other in our time here at the Village.

As I have reflected on our time in the St. Stephen’s Program and have listened to others’ experiences as well, I have been reminded of the Gospel of our Lord: the Good News that, in and through Christ, we can be healed, made whole and set free from the tyranny of sin and death. (This morning’s Matins Gospel is a great summary of these things: the healing of St. Peter’s mother-in-law and of the sick and demon-possessed.) This week and throughout the course of studies we have been reminded of these things and exhorted in light of them.

We have experienced the love of Christ expressed to us through our mentors and teachers. Some of you have described our time here in Residency at the Village as a place of safety and freedom from fear. It has been described as a place of love. Your Graces and Reverend Clergy, thank you for showing us the love of Christ and demonstrating the power of the Gospel through your teaching, and through your interaction with us in the classroom, the lobby and at table. Your love and encouragement truly have been appreciated.

Fellow classmates, thank you for the laughter, the discussions, and your love and encouragement. All of these have been living images of the love of Christ and the power of the Gospel. As we move forward in our struggle for purity of heart and the Kingdom of God, we know that we do not do this alone, but as co-travelers, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Even if our intentions and desires are not fulfilled, may we never lose sight of our singular goal of purity of heart leading to the Kingdom of God. As the Apostle says in Hebrews, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right had of the throne of God.”
Patriarchal Visit and Enthronement
Schedule of Events

DECEMBER 5-7 AT ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL OF BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Preparations are underway for the visit of His Beatitude, JOHN X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the upcoming enthronement of our new Metropolitan JOSEPH. Hierarchs and guests will be with us from all over the world. The following is the public schedule for the weekend.

Friday, December 5th
6:30 p.m. Great Vespers with Antoniasia for the Feast of St. Nicholas

Saturday, December 6th
9:00 a.m. Orthros
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Nicholas, Patron Saint of the Mother Cathedral
4:30 p.m. Prayer of Thanksgiving and Enthronement of Metropolitan JOSEPH.
7:00 p.m. Reception at the Brooklyn Marriott
8:00 p.m. Gala Banquet at the Brooklyn Marriott

Sunday, December 7th
9:15 a.m. Orthros
10:30 a.m. Patriarchal Divine Liturgy

Banquet tickets are $200/person and can be obtained by mailing a check made out to “St. Nicholas Cathedral” to the following address:

St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral
Attn: Banquet Committee
355 State Street
Brooklyn, NY 11217

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to e-mail Archpriest Thomas Zain at abounathomas@me.com, or call the Cathedral at 718.855.6225 and leave a message in his voice-mail.

Finally, to honor Metropolitan JOSEPH on this auspicious occasion, we are preparing a commemorative journal to mark this historic event. Please refer the ad form on the next page if you would like to express your congratulations to our new Metropolitan and welcome our father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X.

We look forward to welcoming you to the “Mother Cathedral” of the Archdiocese to witness this historic event and feast day weekend with our Patriarch and our new Metropolitan.

If you need car transportation while in New York, or going to and from the Airport, or have any other needs while in New York, you may call Hassan Fattouh at 718.757.8383 to discuss various options.

If you are looking for a hotel to stay at during the enthronement weekend, you can visit the interactive calendar on the Cathedral website www.antiochian.org to make your reservations or call the hotel directly. The closest airport to St. Nicholas Cathedral and the Brooklyn Marriott is LaGuardia (LGA) and then JFK. You may also purchase banquet tickets with a Visa or Mastercard credit card on the Cathedral website by choosing the “Donate Now” button on the bottom of the home page. The Cathedral website is www.stritcholascathedral.org. Be sure to note in the memo section the name of the hotel you are staying at. Rooms are being held under the name “St. Nicholas Cathedral.” The deadline for room reservations is November 1, 2014, and the number of rooms is very limited. We were able to secure this hotel is November 1, 2014, and the number of rooms is very limited. We were able to secure this hotel for a fee, for people who might be sharing the cost of a room and transportation, making it a still more affordable option. To make a reservation at the Marriott LayGuardia, please call the hotel directly at 718.446.4800. The provisional reservation is under the name “St. Nicholas Cathedral.” The deadline for this hotel is November 1, 2014, and the number of rooms is very limited. We were able to secure this great rate thanks to the generosity of the owner, who is a parishioner in one of our deanery parishes.

We look forward to welcoming you to this historic event and weekend with our Patriarch and our new Metropolitan.

If you need additional information regarding the enthronement, as well as web links to all of the forms. Contributions to the Commemorative Journal are tax-deductible.

Hotel Information for Enthronement Weekend and Patriarchal Visit

Greetings to you and your families as we begin a new ecclesiastical year. We wanted to share with you information for your hotel reservations at the Brooklyn Marriott. The rate is $299 a night, plus tax. The deadline for reservations is November 7, 2014. If, by the time you receive this, the hotel is sold out, you may also check availability at the following two hotels in close proximity to the Cathedral and the Marriott:

Sheraton Brooklyn, 718.855.1900, www.sheratonbrooklyn.com
Nu Hotel (A boutique hotel just down the block from the Cathedral), 718.852.8855, nuhotelbrooklyn.com

Rooms are being held at the Brooklyn Marriott Hotel. The rate is $299 a night, plus tax. The link to make a reservation is https://aws.passkey.com/event/11950815/owner/13490/home. This link can also be accessed directly via www.antiochian.org in the enthronement section of the website. You can also make a reservation by calling the hotel directly at 718.246.7000. Rooms are being held under the name of “St. Nicholas Institution.” The deadline for room reservations is November 7, 2014; however, the hotel is filling up fast and they may sell out before that date.

The link to make reservations at the Brooklyn Marriott is https://aws.passkey.com/event/11950815/owner/13490/home. The closest airport to St. Nicholas Cathedral and the Brooklyn Marriott is LaGuardia (LGA) and then JFK. You can also use Newark (EWR) airport, but will have to cross tunnels and bridges and pay tolls to get to Brooklyn. The Cathedral and the hotel are less than one mile from each other. The rate is available a little before and after the weekend (you can see on the interactive calendar) in case any of you want to enjoy all that New York has to offer during the Christmas season. The Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center will be lit earlier that week, and the Radio City Christmas Show will be going on during that time, if you are interested.

We also have a small number of rooms set aside at the Marriott Courtyard LayGuardia Airport Hotel for $99 a night, plus tax. This might be an affordable option for those driving to New York, as not only will the rooms be less expensive, but the parking will be more affordable. It is about 10 miles and a 15-to-45-minute drive to the Cathedral, depending on traffic. There should be very light traffic on Saturday and Sunday morning, but there may be heavier traffic in the evening. Car service is also available from the hotel for a fee, for people who might be sharing the cost of a room and transportation, making it a still more affordable option. To make a reservation at the Marriott LayGuardia, please call the hotel directly at 718.446.4800. The provisional reservation is under the name “St. Nicholas Cathedral.” The deadline for this hotel is November 1, 2014, and the number of rooms is very limited. We were able to secure this great rate thanks to the generosity of the owner, who is a parishioner in one of our deanery parishes.

We look forward to welcoming you to this historic event and weekend with our Patriarch and our new Metropolitan.
Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, we, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, gathered in Dallas, Texas, for our Fifth Annual Meeting on September 16 – 18, 2014, greet you with paternal love, as we offer glory and thanks to our Triune God.

Thirty-eight bishops convened in the unity of our holy Orthodox faith, mindful of our responsibility to each other and to the whole Church as the Body of Christ. We opened our Assembly with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the sharing of the Holy Eucharist at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Dallas, Texas, as guests of Metropolitan SABA of Denver. Even as our Church honors the holy and precious Cross, we celebrate the universal and definitive victory of God over evil, sin and death.

We express our deep gratitude to all those who labored for this Fifth Annual Meeting of the Assembly. We recognize the new First Vice-Chairman of the Assembly, Metropolitan Joseph, Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, recently elected to succeed Metropolitan Philip of blessed memory. May our Lord Jesus Christ grant repose to our brother and concelebrant, Metropolitan Philip. The Assembly also welcomes its Second Vice-Chairman, newly consecrated Bishop John of Naro-Fominsk, Administrator of the Patriarchate of Moscow’s parishes in America, and expresses its thanks to Archbishop Hilarion, who has returned to Russia. Finally, we greet the latest member of our Assembly, Bishop SABA, representing the parishes of the Patriarchate of Georgia in the USA.

In the opening session, our Chairman Archbishop Demetrios outlined our responsibility as bishops in witnessing to the Gospel and manifesting God’s love in our world. Therefore, in our conversations, carried out in a spirit of mutual trust and fraternity, we focused on issues related to the role of our Church in society, such as the advancement of religious education and relations with other churches and religions. We heard reports from the directors of the Assembly’s seven agencies, with an overview of their history and current activities. The agencies include the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), Orthodox Christian Network (OCN), Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC), Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), and Eastern Orthodox Committe on Scouting (EOCS).

In particular, we recognized our responsibility to address primarily domestic, but also, by extension, global issues, as the Orthodox Christian community of a nation that plays a decisive role in our world. We are cognizant of this vocation and obligation, especially as we assert the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches scheduled for the Spring of 2016 in Istanbul. Over the next months, we shall have the opportunity to submit specific recommendations and proposals for consideration by the Synod, through its special Pan-Orthodox Preparatory Committee, with a view to overcoming existing canonical anomalies in the United States. We reaffirm our commitment to the decisions of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches and the Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences. In this regard, we engaged in constructive deliberation on the visions of our Church in the United States in light of Orthodox soteriology and canonical law, but also in view of recent immigration developments and trends.

In declaring our common faith and professing our pastoral witness, we pray for the families of our faithful, who face unprecedented and unfairembled challenges due to contemporarv societal trends, especially as a result of the increasing eclipse of the Christian family and its traditional values. Therefore, we emphasize the primary and priority of the family in Christian life, remembering that the first man and woman created in the image and likeness of God constituted a family; that the Incarnate Word was born into a family; and that the crucified Lord was concerned about His family on the precious and life-giving Cross.

Finally, we agreed on the following resolutions:

1) We unanimously agreed on our fervent support for the convocation of the Holy and Great Council in 2016 and extend all those responsible for its realization to work in a spirit of unity and harmony in order to bring this blessed occasion to fruition without any delay or hindrance.

2) We deplore the ongoing violence and extremist bloodshed throughout the world. In the Middle East, hostility and brutality are occurring among members of different religions, sometimes supposedly in the name of religion. We pray for peace and justice in this region, for protection of Christian and other minorities in the ancient lands of Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, as well as for the cessation of racial discrimination, partisan extremism, and religious fanaticism. We especially deplore the violence of the so-called Islamic State, commending our brothers and sisters in the region to work as apostles of peace.

3) In Ukraine, we have watched for months with mounting dismay and grief the armed conflict and unjustifiable bloodshed among our own brothers and sisters. We appeal for humanitarian support of the innocent victims of this conflict. We call upon all parties to deepen the present truce, may church and government leaders in the region be a force of restraint and reconciliation. We pray for dialogue and understanding in this land, whose Christian roots date to over one thousand years ago. May God bring unity and peace to the church and people in Ukraine.

4) We fervently appeal once again for the release of our brother bishops in Syria, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul (Yugay), brother of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch) and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop John (Ibrahim), as well as all kidnapped persons.

5) Moreover, we regret that our brother Archbishop Demetrios of Philadelphia remains imprisoned in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and we implore the authorities in FYROM for a prompt and fair resolution to this issue.

6) We are deeply concerned about the reported dramatic rise of those who label themselves as religiously indifferent, agnostic or atheist. We commit ourselves to raising greater awareness and striving for more ardent preaching of the Christian gospel, while calling upon our faithful to increase their vigilance and continue growing in their understanding of our Church’s teaching and tradition.
In conclusion, we ask for the prayers of our precious and beloved Orthodox faithful, as we continue the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, who went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people (Matthew 4:23). May the abundant blessings of our merciful God be with you all.

We, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, gathered in Dallas, Texas, on September 16–18, 2014, prayed “for the peace of the whole world” (from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) and decried the brutal and bloody violence in the Middle East.

The barbarity perpetrated against Christians, Muslims and vulnerable communities in the Middle East by the self-named Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as well as other jihadist groups, has claimed numerous innocent lives and driven countless people from their homes. It has also threatened the existence of Christian communities, which have enjoyed an uninterrupted presence there for over two thousand years. Recent hostility not only against Christians and Yazidis, but also against Muslims, has shocked the entire civilized world.

Echoing the statement of His Holiness Patriarch JOHN X of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, as well as the other Patriarchs of the East (August 14, 2014), we lament and deplore the egregious and barbarous incidents in the area, involving religious intolerance and fanaticism, that erode the social fabric and unity of the region, destroying churches, shrines and monuments, which are the common heritage of all Christians and, indeed, all humanity.

Along with His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARThOLOMEE, “we cannot remain indifferent or silent before such irrational persecution, cultural intolerance and appalling loss of life, especially when caused by religious hatred and racial hostility” (August 13, 2014). The recent horrific events in Iraq and Syria, Libya and Egypt, and especially in Palestine and Lebanon, demonstrate the dire consequences of remaining complacent in the face of evil.

In this regard, we affirm the Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches (March 9, 2014), which called “for the immediate cessation of military action, liberation of captives, and establishment of peace in the region through dialogue,” stressing “that Christians in the Middle East are a keystone of peace” and emphasizing that “peace for all people also means peace for Christians.”

Therefore:

1) We affirm our solidarity with Christians in the Middle East and pray for their safety, committing ourselves to work for peace and justice in the region.

2) We support international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue, ensuring the security, freedom and human rights of their peoples, and bringing peace to the Holy Land.

3) We encourage all people of good will to support agencies, already hard at work throughout the region, in their efforts to assist the displaced populations in order that they may return to their homes.

4) We urge governments and authorities to insist upon the fundamental human rights and religious freedom of all, ultimately establish the rule of law, and immediately desist from supporting extremist groups and oppressive governments, whether through financial means or military areas.

5) We urge the United Nations and the international community, and especially the government of our United States of America, to establish policies that promote peace and justice for all in the region, while refraining from all forms of violence.

6) We firmly reiterate our call for the immediate release of our brothers, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan PAUL (Tsouk) and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop JOHN (Ibrahim), both of Aleppo in Syria, who were kidnapped on April 22, 2013, as well as the release of all innocent captives.

Finally, above and beyond our appeal and prayer for peace and justice, mindful that “what is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27), we place our ultimate hope in “God, who is the source of peace” (Rom. 16:20).

Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America
Statement on the Middle East
Blessed are the peacemakers. (Matt. 5:9)

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This past June 25 to the 28th, 2014, the North American Archdiocese participated in a conference at the Balamand University entitled: UNITY IN ANTIOCH. On Sunday, June 29th, the conference culminated with a large tent celebrating the Patrons of our Patriarchate under a large tent celebrating the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, during which His Beatitude would come to each table to greet us. Following this period, on Sunday after the Liturgy, Fawaz El Kheury invited our group to go to Restaurant Ehden and arranged for a sumptuous lunch. While the delegation stayed at a hotel in Byblos, I was a guest at the home of my former parishioner, Elias Abu Shaheen, in Amioun, Lebanon. His hospitality, along with the help of Sarah Sarraf and Nabil Nahas of Beirut, and of Kald Kardous and family of Beirut, allowed me to attend the sessions while enjoying the comforts of home and Lebanese hospitality.

One of my paradoxions, Mima Abou Abboud, lost her mother, who lived in Douma. Michel Sardos, who was visiting from Montreal, made himself available so that I could visit her. At the same time I visited the home of the late Metropolitan ANTONY Bashir. It will become a museum. They have also named a Senior Citizens Complex after him. While I was in Douma, I discovered that they have a church that is for the Tibshraenys family. All my life I was told that the Tibshraenys came from Bakitta. I was also able to pay a visit to the Convent of Our Lady of the Presentation in Arafilah, where my grandmother’s first cousins, Mother Mary Jo and Belagia Tibshraeny, lived for many years until their repose. A pilgrimage here is always a treat.

Speaking of consecrated nuns, I had a blessed encounter with Mother Belagia Sayyad of Maaloula, who told me of the horrors of their captivity, and the new Mother Superior of Our Lady of Saydnaya Monastery, who told of their miraculous deliverance from the rebels. All this brought home the trauma of the war in Syria. As the evening was drawing to a close, His Beatitude signaled for us to come and talk with him. As during previous meetings, he took our hands, looked into our eyes and told us to trust him to do the right thing by this Archdiocese. Lo and behold, on July 4, 2014, the Holy Synod almost unanimously elected Archbishop JOSEPH as the new Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America.

Where certain issues remain to be resolved, the Patriarch overlooked certain rumors and contentions, and it is his leadership that is essential for the final result. The election of Archbishop JOSEPH as Metropolitan does not mean that we love any of the other candidates any less. The Holy Spirit has revealed Himself in the past two elections, first with His Beatitude and now with Metropolitan JOSEPH. I was in Lebanon the previous month, invited by the Honorable Gebran Bassil, Foreign Minister, to participate in the Worldwide Conference on the Diaspora. It was during this trip that I was able to spend quality time with His Eminence Metropolitan ELIAS (Audi) of Beirut. Later I was invited to Damascus at the request of His Beatitude JOHNN X for a lengthy meeting. Gazing into the eyes of His Beatitude, one connects immediately with a person of great integrity and spirituality. His Beatitude took notes and was particularly interested in the work of the Antiochian Heritage Foundation. It was then that he extended to me an invitation to attend the Conference. Following the meeting, I was hosted at a lunch with Bishop EPHRAIM (Malouli) and his team. We spent a warm afternoon touring the Patriarchate to see the work of His Beatitude.

Driving back to Beirut, I mused about my previous meetings with the late Patriarch IGNATIUS IV, and I realized “there is a new man in town.” I found it quite amazing that our new Patriarch has broken fresh ground in constructing new institutions, which he blessed with great fanfare at a reception. All the while he has had to cope with the uncertainty of the whereabouts of his brother and the tenacious situation in Syria. From all my meetings with His Beatitude, I saw that we are witnessing the work of a real visionary. He is earnest in his love and determined in his will to lead the Patriarchate into the Twenty-First Century.

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To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? ... It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown, grows up, and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.”

Patriarchal Vicar Metropolitan SILOUAN, the Antiochian Archdiocese celebrated its first Pascha in forty-eight years without Sayidna PHILIP. Our Holy Orthodox Church, however, has gone on, as it has for over two thousand years, and the Antiochian Archdiocese is now blessed to be led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH.

In 1973, the organization known as the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America was formed under the vision of Metropolitan PHILIP. Over the past year has been overwhelming for the Antiochian Women and for our beloved Archdiocese. Last March, we experienced the passing of His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP into eternal life. In the cycle of services in the Orthodox Church, His Eminence left this earthy world on a Wednesday evening during the Lenten Period, when our churches across the Archdiocese were celebrating the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts. Under the guidance of our Metropolitan JOSEPH, our Holy Orthodox Faith which, like the mustard seed in the parable, will grow and thrive.

Our project has two goals. The first is the ultimate goal of these funds will be given directly to the Antiochian Patriarchate to be used for the orphans. We now look forward to a new project, and a new vision, as His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH may lead us. For 2014-2015, the Antiochian Women will work on “Nurturing the Seeds of Orthodoxy Across North America.”

Our project has two goals. The first is the ultimate establishment of “Regional Camping and Learning Centers.” Metropolitan JOSEPH’S vision is to offer programs throughout all of North America that focus on Orthodoxy – our way of life, our worship, and our faith. We must reach out to children and adults of all ages. Our intention is to promote and develop our Holy Orthodox Faith which, like the mustard seed in Christ’s parable, will grow and thrive.

The second goal of this project is the establishment of monastic communities. Monasteries are where the Gospel is lived on a daily basis. The monks and nuns within the walls pray for us and the world unceasingly. Monasteries are also where we go for spiritual nourishment and refreshment, a place of beauty and holiness. Overseas, Antiochian monasteries are plentiful, but in North America they are sorely lacking. The goal of parishes to at least 260 churches and missions as of 2014.

Are we to sit by now that we have achieved such magnificent growth? Are we to be satisfied and now give ourselves rest? Of course not! In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? ... It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown, grows up, and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade”. (Mark 4:30-32). We must use the talents that God gave us by blessing us with the magnificent gift of Orthodox Christianity. Let us nurture these mustard seeds, let us spread the word of our faith to the peoples of North America.

Materials have already been mailed to all Antiochian Women Diocesan Presidents, Vice Presidents/Project Coordinators, and Spiritual Advisors, and individual parishes may have already received this information. Each church and mission should start planning now for “Antiochian Women’s Month” in March. We urge all of the faithful of the Antiochian Archdiocese to embrace this project.
Coming to Love the Trinity

Garrett "Justin" Brannon

"I love the Trinity." I remember the first time I heard Protestant apologist James White say that. At the time, I was a Choseness Pentecostal, and when I heard the term “Trinity” I thought of an overly systematized gospel infused with platonics and neo-platonics philosophy, replete with technical jargon that was more or less invented by abstract theologians. Terms that could not be found in Holy Scripture were some of my major stumbling blocks: “Eternally-begetten Son”; “hypostatic union”; “homoousios”; “union”; “perichoresis.”

I had no love for this dogma, any more than I had love for the manual to my car. It was all merely technical, traditionalist “theobabble,” interesting to some, but not necessary for me. Even when I came to acknowledge that Modalism didn’t quite satisfy the meaning of Scripture, and thought I accepted a Trinitarian prophecy. How could I know truth if not for the collective work of the Father, the Logos, and the Spirit benevolence? Why should I trust another creature with my salvation? I cannot. I can only trust God. Only the Uncreated could recreate the creature, so I know that if Jesus were to save me, Jesus, the Son, must be God.

Now I know that my salvation was the personal work of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and so I have come to a place where I can say, “I love the Trinity.” My God is no longer some mere mental exercise, but the Redeemer of my soul, and my family. This is not merely an act of the past – an obscure, faceless one for the huddled masses of humanity – but is personal. When I was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon me in the waters and cleansed me of my sins, and empowered me to live a holy life. Before I taste the body and blood of Christ, I am reminded once again that my salvation is a Trinitarian effort, as Father Steven prays to the Father that the Holy Spirit would descend upon the gifts and “make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ . . . and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ, changing them by Your Holy Spirit.”

God is omniscient? So is the Logos. Is God omnipotent? So is the Logos. Is God love? So is the Logos. The Father sent his Son into the world as an act of benevolence. The Son willingly was crucified for us, as an act of benevolence. His resurrection was the overthrow of death on our behalf. Only God could save me from the depths of my spiritual depravity. Why should I trust another creature with my salvation? I cannot. I can only trust God. Only the Uncreated could recreate the creature, so I know that if Jesus were to save me, Jesus, the Son, must be God.

As I studied the Orthodox writers, I came to love Saint Justin the Martyr, who explained to me that the Logos was fully God in every way that the Father is. The Hospitality of Abraham (Old Testament) is not merely an act of the past – an obscure, faceless one for the huddled masses of humanity – but is personal. When I was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon me in the waters and cleansed me of my sins, and empowered me to live a holy life. Before I taste the body and blood of Christ, I am reminded once again that my salvation is a Trinitarian effort, as Father Steven prays to the Father that the Holy Spirit would descend upon the gifts and “make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ . . . and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ, changing them by Your Holy Spirit.”

As I read Athanasius, I came to understand that the Logos was fully God in every way that the Father is.

“...and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ, changing them by Your Holy Spirit.”

God is omniscient? So is the Logos. Is God omnipotent? So is the Logos. Is God love? So is the Logos. The Father sent his Son into the world as an act of benevolence. The Son willingly was crucified for us, as an act of benevolence. His resurrection was the overthrow of death on our behalf. Only God could save me from the depths of my spiritual depravity. Why should I trust another creature with my salvation? I cannot. I can only trust God. Only the Uncreated could recreate the creature, so I know that if Jesus were to save me, Jesus, the Son, must be God.

Now I know that my salvation was the personal work of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and so I have come to a place where I can say, “I love the Trinity.” My God is no longer some mere mental exercise, but the Redeemer of my soul, and my family. This is not merely an act of the past – an obscure, faceless one for the huddled masses of humanity – but is personal. When I was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon me in the waters and cleansed me of my sins, and empowered me to live a holy life. Before I taste the body and blood of Christ, I am reminded once again that my salvation is a Trinitarian effort, as Father Steven prays to the Father that the Holy Spirit would descend upon the gifts and “make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ... and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ, changing them by Your Holy Spirit.”

I can say now with full affection and true adoration: I love the Trinity.

Garrett “Justin” Brannon
All Saints of North America Antiochian Orthodox Church
Maryland Heights, Missouri
All Things are Possible through Christ …

Our world, despite its claim to modernity, continues to engage in the traditional debate over humanity’s purpose. Some say, “Our existence is a fortunate, scientific coincidence, and the universe has no deeper meaning.” Others affirm, “Truth is subjective, so everyone should decide their paths for themselves.” Others suggest, “There can’t be a God, but we should still try to get along and be nice.” Our race cannot seem to come to a consensus on life’s meaning. This dissonance of ideas leads to a world suffering from confusion and dissatisfaction, because none of these ideas guides humans to fulfill their nature. When we rebel against the nature God “hard-wired” us with — a nature seeking union with God — we can’t harvest true joy from life. As Blessed Augustine of Hippo says, “Our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in Thee (God).”

Christians should not fall into our world’s rut of confusion, because Christ makes our life’s mission obvious. He commands us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Love is the entire foundation of our existence summed up in a beautiful, four-letter package, the channel through which God endows us with His grace so that we can reenact His sacrifice, to become Christ’s abode, recreating us as vessels of Himself. As Saint Paul writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Through the death of our selfishness during Liturgy, our will aligns with the Lord’s will. Our love transmits His love, and our charitable demeanor channels His peace into the world.

As we leave the Liturgy to serve our neighbors, Christ will walk alongside us. He will be crucified with us when we reach our Golgothas in the world. He will strengthen us with His grace so that we can retransmit His sacrifice. It is only after having given all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength to God, to become Christ’s abode, that we can give all of ourselves to our neighbors and properly serve them.

Yet even when we receive Christ into our lives, we still hold back from fully serving humanity. We selectively serve our neighbors. Everyone can love their friends and family, but few want to be crucified for strangers, who have wronged us, those we deem morally corrupt, or our worst enemies; as Christians, however, we cannot choose not to love some people. Christ tells us, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:32).

Christians are called to a greater standard: to imitate the unconditional love of God himself. Christ died for all mankind, including the unrepentant thief, the aggressive Roman soldiers, and the hypocritical Jewish scribes of our faith and reflect on the significance of love. If we don’t have this spiritual quality, what credit do we have? Brothers and sisters in Christ, this conference has granted us a precious opportunity to return to the basics of our faith and reflect on the significance of love. I must ask myself: Have I ignored the significance of love in my spiritual life? Do I exalt our religious practices over true Christian living? Have we left the gifts Christ gives me in the Divine Liturgy? Why do I prevent Christ from living in me? Which Golgothas do I avoid? Who do I marginalize in my life because my pride bars me from loving them? What can I do to break the chains that hold me back from commanding all of my life to Christ our God? We must ask ourselves these questions and seek repentance for the unloving decisions we have made in our lives. If we approach God with a contrite and humble heart, Christ will raise us up from our spiritual darkness into His sanctifying light. Then, we can receive Him back into our lives, take up our crosses, and sacrifice our lives for our neighbors. This is our purpose as human beings. We all must accept our crosses and attain Christ’s standard of unconditional love, for, as Saint Paul says, without love, we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).
COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

CAMP ST. INNOCENT

During the last week of August, with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Camp St. Innocent (CSI) took place, the first Antiochian camping event in Western Canada. The camp took place at the Gull Lake Centre, an excellent facility located about eighty-five miles south of Edmonton, Alberta.

The camp was sponsored by St. Philip Church in Edmonton and Annunciation Church of Calgary, but campers also came from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Vancouver, British Columbia. There were 23 campers, which, for a first camp, seems to be a pretty good turnout. This is especially true if you consider the long distances some of the campers had to travel to come: those from Saskatoon drove over for seven hours, and those from Vancouver about twelve hours.

Although the travel times were long, the camp was worth it. The campers got to swim and canoe in the sparkling and warm waters of Gull Lake. They also spent one afternoon rock-climbing, and on the rainy day played games in the very large gymnasium. Did I mention the food? From caramel oatmeal in the morning to build-your-own burritos and roast-your-own hot dogs over an open fire, everyone had plenty of good food to enjoy.

One camper did remark as he was going up for seconds: “But it’s still not as good as my Mom’s.”

Three clergy attended the camp and provided morning and evening liturgical services and daily instruction for the campers, along with lots of cheering and support during the games times. During the daily teaching time, the clergy spoke about the meaning of faith, as the theme of the camp was CSI: Investigating the Power of Faith.” In addition, some of the clergy even played soccer and canoe with the campers.

On the first evening of the camp, one of the clergy spoke to the campers about the life and legacy of our Father Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory, and together we prayed the Trisagion prayers for the peace of his soul. Also, Chris Shahid gave an interesting talk on the life and ministry of St. Innocent (the patron saint of CSI). Then we all joined together in a service of supplication for St. Innocent.

By the end of the week, many former strangers had become good friends, and everyone was eager to come back next year. So many people worked long hours and contributed funds to make this camp successful! That I could never thank them all. I would like, however, especially to thank Chris Shahid from the Antiochian Village, who did an excellent job running the camp, and to thank them all. I would like, however, especially to thank Chris Shahid from the Antiochian Village, who did an excellent job running the camp, and to thank them all.

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period in Syria. The interior was beautifully painted with iconography during the summer of 2013 by Dr. George Kordis from the University of Athens and his team of iconographers.

On Saturday, May 10, 2014, Bishop ANTHONY, Fr. Nabil and many guest clergy joined nearly five hundred faithful to open the doors of the new temple officially. Following the short service, the ribbon was cut by Bishop ANTHONY, Fr. Nabil, and several parishioners and representatives from the construction crew and town of Fishers. Among the first to cut the ribbon was Ruth George, 98, who was ten years old when the first church building was consecrated in 1926, and who has now witnessed her third church-door-opening at the parish. She also read a prayer she wrote for this special occasion. During the dinner following Liturgy, the Parish Council again surprised Fr. Nabil with a cash gift to allow him and Kh. Elaine to take a trip to the Holy Land in the near future.

Preceding this event, the Parish Council and Building Committee hosted Bishop ANTHONY at a dinner to celebrate the completion of construction and to present Fr. Nabil with the first of a few surprises that weekend. Since it was Mother’s Day weekend, they arranged a visit from Fr. Nabil’s mother, Lucy Hanna, from St. Andrew Church, Riverside, California, so that she could be a part of the weekend celebrations.

In all, the weekend was a great way for the parish to celebrate the end of major construction on this magnificent new temple and to open our doors, not only for ourselves, but for the whole community.
Patriarchial Visit and Enthronement Schedule of Events
DECEMBER 5-7 AT ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL OF BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Preparations are underway for the visit of His Beatitude, JOHN X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the upcoming enthronement of our new Metropolitan JOSEPH. Hierarchs and guests will be with us from all over the world. The following is the public schedule for the weekend:

Friday, December 5th
6:30 p.m. Great Vespers with Artoklasia for the Feast of St. Nicholas

Saturday, December 6th
9:00 a.m. Orthros
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Nicholas, Patron Saint of the Mother Cathedral
4:30 p.m. Prayer of Thanksgiving and Enthronement of Metropolitan JOSEPH
7:00 p.m. Reception at the Brooklyn Marriott
8:00 p.m. Gala Banquet at the Brooklyn Marriott

Sunday, December 7th
9:15 a.m. Orthros
10:30 a.m. Patriarchal Divine Liturgy

Banquet tickets are $200/person and can be obtained by mailing a check made out to “St. Nicholas Cathedral” to the following address:
St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral
Attn: Banquet Committee
355 State Street
Brooklyn, NY 11217

Commemorative Journal Deadline:
November 7, 2014
You may also register for the Commemorative Journal on-line at www.antiochian.org/enthronement
Please make checks payable to Antiochian Archdiocese
Memo: Commemorative Journal
Mail to Antiochian Archdiocese
358 Mountain Road
Englewood, NJ 07631

THE WORD
358 Mountain Road
PO Box 5238
Englewood, NJ 07631-5238