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The Word

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MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

52nd

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION

Convened at the Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, MA

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The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTOUN

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

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

Founded in Arabic as
Al Kalimat in 1905
by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)
Founded in English as
The WORD in 1957
by Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir)

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Have the Antiochians Changed Their Minds?

Many are asking if the Antiochians have changed their minds about Orthodox unity in America. Our response to the Proposal of the Canonical Regional Planning Committee printed in *The WORD* deserves some clarification. After all, Patriarch IGNATIUS IV, Metropolitan ANTONY and Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory, as well as the Antiochian Archdiocese in North America have been calling for administrative unity for almost a century. We must have a detailed understanding of the terms under which this unity will be achieved, however. There are many questions which still remain unanswered, and until we have detailed answers it is entirely possible that the proposed unity will not uplift the Church in America, but may very well cause harm, which can never be allowed.

Metropolitan JOSEPH has reassured us that he remains committed to the process of bringing administrative unity to the new world, and more. "More" means a unified outreach to the unchurched Orthodox and non-Orthodox in the neighborhoods of our churches. "More" means mutual respect and cooperation of all people. "More" means meeting the real needs of the faithful in all of our Churches. "More" means that Orthodox churches in the new world take care of everybody, regardless of ethnic identity. To do this we need to be creative, cooperative, open to God and willing to work with each other. In Metropolitan JOSEPH's words, "While the idea of the Assembly is noble, we need to address many concerns."

There remain many questions that need to be addressed before real unity can be achieved. These questions must be adequately explored before a concrete proposal can be made to a Pan-Orthodox Council. We have some questions of our own. Under what specific conditions would the mother churches be willing to release their daughter churches? If some of the churches released their daughter churches, to whom would they release them? How will bishops for America be elected? How can we organize in such a way to care best for the people in our parishes? Who will decide when a parish is viable and should be blessed to continue? How will we care for the parishes that use the Western Rite? Will the

laity be included in the leadership of the Church?

At the Assembly of Bishops, the Canonical Regional Planning Committee was asked to find canonists to study all of the world's autocephalous churches and their histories to find canonical models that may help us discern what is best for us. We also asked the committee to work with bishops in regions of North America to develop models on paper (that is, not implemented) that may be proposed. As Antiochians, we support and applaud these efforts. We are also committed to working together as an Assembly, and locally with the other Orthodox bishops in the region that we serve to bring our people together. Presently, many parish faithful don't



5th Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA
Photo: GANP/Dimitrios Panagos

know their Orthodox neighbors. Unity is not something that should be imposed from above.

There is no doubt in my mind that all of the bishops are sincere, God-loving men seeking God's will. We believe God's will is to serve His people best. We believe all Orthodox are His Church. We need to be open to God's Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us to meet best the needs of His holy Church. We must not lose the unity that God *has given us* in a process to unite *administratively*. We need to be faithful to God and each other.

Bp. JOHN



His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH Addresses St. Vladimir Seminary

Crestwood, New York – Sept 14, 2015

Your Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Father John, Father Chad, reverend fathers, and beloved faculty and students of Saint Vladimir's seminary,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

It is my joy to be present with you as you begin your new academic year, with your classes having already begun, and your studies as students, and burdens as professors, already well underway!

St. Vladimir's Seminary has a long history of educating leaders and theologians, and many of our clergy and hierarchs have come to us with the firm foundation that has been imparted to them through their education at St. Vladimir's Seminary. This legacy is greatly appreciated by all of us. St. Vladimir's Seminary and the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese have a rich, positive and fruitful history, and I pledge to do all that I can during my tenure as Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of North America to maintain and enhance this relationship.

Allow me to make some points in this short talk, using St. Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, as an example to illustrate what is important.

During this entire year, we have been celebrating the centennial of the repose of our father among the saints, Raphael (Hawaweeny) of Brooklyn. During our various Antiochian diocesan and archdiocesan gatherings this year, our Bible Bowl and Oratorical competitions,

preaching and teaching opportunities, camps and retreats, we have reflected upon the life and work of this great man, the first bishop to be ordained in this land, and the last one glorified in this country before the turn of the century. By reflecting upon St. Raphael's achievements and his Orthodox Christian theology and ethic as a theologian and missionary, we can gain great profit for our common endeavors for Christ's sake in these days.

The saint is famous for his manner of stating his identity: "I am Syro-Arab by birth, a Greek by primary education, an American by residence, a Russian at heart, and a Slav in soul." This sentiment expresses profoundly the Orthodox Catholic vision of humanity united "not by the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God." We have the particularity of our various lands and nations of origin, but our identity as Orthodox Christians stems from our confession of faith and the baptismal font where we derive our "birth from above," and so we can charitably call every man our brother, since Christ made us all to be renewed in Himself. St Raphael knew this and lived it. He said: "We realize that the Orthodox Church of Christ is 'One,' because while she is composed of different nations and multiple peoples, yet she is one in faith, one in sacraments, and one in sacred canons. The different Orthodox churches named after certain locations or

languages, such as Greek, Russian, Syrian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, American, or Japanese, are integral members of the one body of the Orthodox Catholic Church, whose head is the Lord Jesus Christ."

I am with you here today in this theological school founded upon similar principles. The practical universality of St. Raphael, as expressed in his own words cited above, meets the intellectual universality of many deans and professors of this school, such as Fr. Georges Florovsky, one of your "stars in the firmament" of the history of this school. Throughout the theological history of this school, faculty and students always rejected any kind of narrow parochialism and embraced an outreach in the Name of the Lord. The academic community of Saint Vladimir expressed the same vision as the saint, however, in an intellectual and academic context, in order to win a listening audience. Let us entertain, then, some of Florovsky's words in particular to elaborate on this point: "Insofar as it is a question of winning lost souls for catholic truth, of the way to bring them 'to the reason of truth,' every course of action must be 'economical,' that is, pastoral, compassionate, loving," and "ultimate Truth is not a static 'world of ideas' but a Living Person... a personal encounter and a continuous intercourse with the Living God. The ultimate goal... is precisely the holy man and the holy community, i.e. the Holy Church, and not just the holy system." St Raphael, however, was the American forerunner in expressing this catholicity, as he was imbued with this same spirit.

Also, I wish to point out St Raphael's courage and fortitude in expressing the correct doctrine in the Americas. This fact may be well-known to you: for many years in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Orthodox Christians were hosted by Protestant churches, since they did not have their own church temples yet. You here at St. Vladimir's Seminary are as aware of this in your early history as we are of ours. St. Raphael, like many of your professors, was at first very flexible and open to see where the grace of God might lead this partnership. In his early years in America, the saint was very open to the possibility of organic union with some of the more traditionally minded Protestants. Over time, however, he came to see that this was not pastorally a safe path to pursue. So, despite pressures to the contrary, Bishop Raphael took a strong stand on defending the Faith against liturgical or dogmatic compromise. For example, he wrote, "For a sacrament to be properly performed, it must be administered by a canonically ordained Orthodox bishop or priest Any Orthodox person who accepts sacraments from a non-Orthodox priest will be cut off from mem-

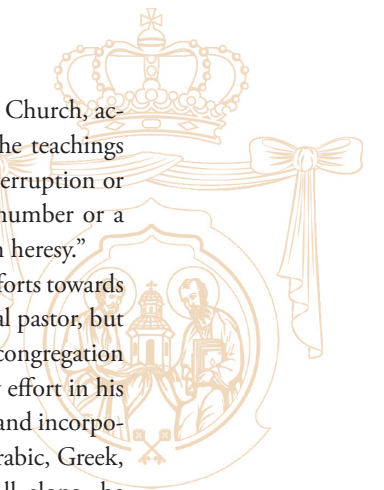
bership in the Church." The teaching of the Church, according to Saint Raphael, "is built upon the teachings of Christ and his pure Apostles without interruption or change even if she is confined to a small number or a small place as it was in the days of the Arian heresy."

Catholicity implies also all-embracing efforts towards holiness. St. Raphael was not only a practical pastor, but he was also a teacher aiming at leading his congregation towards sanctity. In doing so he made every effort in his writings to include a wide range of sources, and incorporated Eastern and Western scholarship in Arabic, Greek, Slavonic, English, German and French. All along, he focused on leading the people towards the knowledge of God, and towards their sanctification. St. Raphael stated: "We are fully aware that the Orthodox Church of Christ is 'sacred' because all her sacraments are sacred, her teachings are sacred, and her canons are pure, not connected with a secular spirit, thus sufficient for sanctifying the spirits of her members." For this reason, he put his skills to work in the compilation of sacred texts for use in the American environment, and also for theological education in general. He founded *The WORD* magazine in 1905, a practical organ for communication of Orthodox information and ideas. Building upon this heritage, Saint Vladimir's Seminary had a similar desire: you reached out to non-Orthodox Christian leaders and academic theologians in order to promote a meaningful and personal encounter through which the Faith could be best expressed.

So, today, in these days of confusion and both ethical and dogmatic indifference, how much do we need to be reminded of the strong, courageous, well-expressed, lived-out and sustained vision of Orthodox catholicity as we see it in Saint Raphael's writings?

The deepening of theological education is dear to me as a hierarch. I want my priests and deacons to be well-educated in every way, and ready to express the Faith and also to engage the culture around us. We live now in a perilous state in society in general, both morally and intellectually. We need to be ready to reach out to everyone, with confidence that we can address their need for spiritual healing with the holy Gospel.

I am ready to take stock of the whole enterprise of theological education in this land and to bring my influence to bear, as a member of the Holy Synod of the See of Antioch, in promoting a truly catholic vision of our Orthodox faith and life. I invite you to join with me in this endeavor. With God's help, everything is possible.





(L to R): Professor Predrag Matejic; Fr. John Behr; Metropolitan TIKHON; Metropolitan JOSEPH; Fr. Chad Hatfield (Photo: Jasmine Yedigarian)

HIERARCHS TIKHON AND JOSEPH HONORED AT 2015 Meyendorff Lecture on Slavic Christianity

On Monday, September 14, 2015, the Board of Trustees and Faculty of St. Vladimir's Seminary bestowed a Doctor of Divinity degree, *honoris causa*, on His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH.

His Beatitude the Most Blessed TIKHON, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, was awarded with an honorary doctorate as well.

"We have the great honor today of being able to bestow the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, not upon one, but two worthy recipients – two leading hierarchs of the Orthodox Church in this country – the President and Vice President of the Board of Trustees of St. Vladimir's Seminary," noted the Very Rev. Dr. John

Behr, Dean. "Both hierarchs, although only appointed to their positions in recent years, have distinguished themselves through many years of ministry. Your Beatitude and Your Eminence, you truly honor us today by your presence and acceptance of the degree to be awarded."

In the citations read aloud by Dr. Peter Bouteneff, Professor of Systematic Theology, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH was praised as a "true pastor of pastors" and "a leading voice among the hierarchs," while



His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON was commended for his commitment to securing the future and stability of theological education in North America, with a particular interest in the spiritual formation of clergy.

After receiving the Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, His Eminence expressed his gratitude to the Board of Trustees and Faculty. "St. Vladimir's has a long history of educating leaders and theologians," said Metropolitan JOSEPH. "Many of our hierarchs have come to us with a firm foundation, imparted to them by St. Vladimir's Seminary. I pledge to do all I can during my tenure to maintain and enhance this relationship."

In his acceptance speech, His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON remarked, "Our church in North America, as His Eminence so clearly stated, is composed of people from various backgrounds, all of us struggling to be united in Christ. It is at institutions like St. Vladimir's that that effort – striving for unity in Christ – is actualized."

Following the bestowal of the honorary doctorates, Professor Predrag Matejic, Curator of the Hilandar Research Library and Director of the Resource Center for Medieval Slavic Studies, presented the third annual Father John Meyendorff Memorial Lecture. (The Library

and Resource Center began in the 1960s, when the monks of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos invited Dr. Matejic's own father, Father Mateja Matejic, to come to catalogue every treasure in the monastery. It is now the largest collection of medieval Slavic manuscripts on microfilm in the world.)

Fr. John Behr observed, "Father John (Meyendorff) was known as an outstanding and warm scholar, encouraging younger scholars in their work and able to answer almost any question – however arcane or obscure." "As such, it is very fitting that we have the honor this evening of hearing from another scholar, Dr. Predrag Matejic, who also has such a reputation: for encouraging scholars across the world in their study of Slavic Christianity and for being able to answer the most obscure questions pertaining to Byzantino-Slavic Christianity."

Professor Matejic's presentation was titled "Byzantium, the Slavs, and the Rise of the Russian Orthodox Church." He focused on three historical periods of Slavic Orthodoxy: the conversion of the Slavs and the establishment of the Glagolitic alphabet; the rule and influence of Simeon I the Great of Bulgaria; and the immediate effects of the fall of Constantinople in 1453 on the Russian Orthodox Church.

Fr. Chad Hatfield, Chancellor/CEO, drapes Metropolitan JOSEPH with the doctoral hood. (Photo: Jasmine Yedigarian [SVOTS Communications/Yonkers, NY]; View the photo gallery at <https://www.svots.edu/category/image-galleries/sept-2015-meyendorff-lecture>)

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION

*Convened at the Sheraton Boston Hotel
Boston, MA*

Thursday, July 23, 2015 – 10:45 AM

I. OPENING PRAYER

His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X offered the opening prayer, and His Grace Bishop Basil led the singing of the Troparion of Holy Pentecost.

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH officially called the convention to order under Patriarch JOHN X.

Metropolitan JOSEPH extended the convention's welcome to Their Eminences DAMASKINOS of Sao Paolo and all Brazil, SABA of Bosra-Hauran, EPHRAIM of Tripoli and Northern Lebanon, Their Graces Bishops Gregory and Nicholas, auxiliaries to the Patriarch, and the beloved hierarchs of the Archdiocese, Their Graces Bishops Antoun, Basil, Thomas, Alexander, John, Anthony and Nicholas.

His Eminence acknowledged the officers of the Antiochian Archdiocese, Mr. Fawaz El-Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dr. John D. Dalack, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Robert H. Laham, Treasurer of the Archdiocese, V. Rev. Fr. Michael Elias, Secretary of the Archdiocese, and Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor.

II. ROLL CALL AND QUORUM

Upon the call of Metropolitan JOSEPH, Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, declared the existence of a quorum and the qualification to conduct the business of the Archdiocese.



III. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENTION OFFICERS

Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed the Sergeants-at-Arms of the convention: Mr. Rami Younes, Mr. Philip Saliba, Mr. Constantine Kari, and Ms. Darlene Haddad.

IV. INTRODUCTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

His Eminence introduced the members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees who were present: Mr. Salim Aboud, Mr. Daniel J. Abraham, Mr. Edward E. Assile, Mr. James G. Bach, Dr. Anthony S. Bashir, Dr. Isa S. Canavati, Dr. John D. Dalack, Mr. George G. Darany, Dr. Elias K. Hebek, Ms. Elaine Heider, Mr. Khalil E. Kardous, Mr. Gregory H. Laham, Ms. Sondra Murr Love, Dr. George M. Madanat, Dr. Nicholas J. Massad, Jr., Mr. William D. Morrison, Mr. George N. Nassor, Mr. Majed J. Nesheiwat, Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, Mr. Mansour O. Rayan, Dr. Raymond J. Rishwain, Mrs. Violet K. Robbat, Mr. Philip N. Saliba, Mr. Khalil G. Samara, Mr. Elias Shaheen, Mr. Douglas J. Skaff, Dr. George Thomas, Mr. Richard J. Zakka, Mr. Dimitri C. Zeidan, and Honorary Members Mr. George Elias, Jr., Dr. Sam H. Kouri, and Mr. William Nassir.

His Eminence encouraged the General Assembly to do God's business with love, respect, dignity and forgiveness because God has entrusted His people with this ministry. He noted that this was his first convention as the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese. In order to provide more time to receive the message of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN concerning events in Syria and region on the theme "The Unity of Antioch," His Eminence directed that the departments and organizations of the Archdiocese would not present oral reports. Rather, all reports appeared on the archdiocesan website where delegates and parishes could review them and prepare to ask questions during the General Assembly.

V. FIRST PRESENTATION BY HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH JOHN X

The text of His Beatitude's first presentation appeared in the September issue of *The WORD* magazine. He introduced a 7-minute video of current conditions in Syria and the Near East prepared by the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch.

After the presentation of His Beatitude, Metropolitan JOSEPH announced the passing of the Very Rev. Fr. Gordon Walker. Funeral arrangements are pending.

VI. MINUTES OF THE 51ST ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION, HOUSTON, TX, JULY 2013

Dr. Elias Hebek moved to accept the Minutes of the 51st Archdiocese Convention held in Houston, TX, in July 2013. V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas Dahdal seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

VII. SPECIAL REPORTS FROM VISITING HIERARCHS AND HEADS OF ORGANIZATIONS

Metropolitan DAMASKINOS (with V. Rev. Fr. Joseph Antypas translating) described the history of his archdiocese as similar to that of the history of North America. Since his arrival in Brazil in 1997, his work has been similar to that of St. Raphael, i.e., gathering the scattered Orthodox. He observed that the field is vast, laborers are few. He stressed that Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking, third world nation which needs evangelists as well as pastors. He affirmed the unity of the Church of Antioch world-wide, and he thanked Metropolitan JOSEPH for the opportunity to speak.

Metropolitan SABA of Haran and Basra (with V. Rev. Fr. Joseph Antypas translating) described his archdiocese as being in the southern part of Syria. The territory is vast, and the faithful are poor and scattered. Haran had been a large archdiocese, but it has steadily decreased under the current circumstances; nevertheless, it will preserve and maintain. In the past ten years there had been a renaissance, but the war has interrupted that progress. He expressed his appreciation for the work of the Archdiocese of North America. With the blessing of the late Metropolitan PHILIP and now of Metropolitan JOSEPH, Bishop Basil and the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America have demonstrated the unity of the Patriarchate, both through mutual prayer and financial support. His Eminence asked for prayers for peace and for progress.

Metropolitan EPHRAIM of Tripoli reported that his archdiocese, which also includes the Koura and





dependencies, has relatively few but very active Christians. He noted the development of two new centers. The first, the Theological Pastoral Center, has hosted a series of conferences throughout the year which gathers persons of all ages. The aim of the Center is to teach Orthodox dogma on a pastoral basis. The second center, inaugurated approximately eighteen months ago, is centered on the family and youth. A Help Center is open to everyone and makes referrals to appropriate specialists. At his consecration in Damascus Patriarch IGNATIUS IV advised him as a new bishop not to wait for people to come to him, but to go to the people. He asserted that the Church must be dynamic in finding new ways to deal with our people, with specialists to go around to all towns as St. Raphael had done in both east and west to preach the Word of God.

VIII. REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

A. Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2015

Mr. Robert Laham, Treasurer, presented the Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2015 with emphasis on the chart which appears on page 3.

Mr. Raed Sweiss moved to accept the report. Mr. George Darany seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Metropolitan JOSEPH noted the strong financial foundation laid by Metropolitan PHILIP. The finances of the archdiocese are in good hands, and everyone must work hard to keep the finances in good hands and growing. His Eminence recognized that Bob Laham has worked hard for many years in his capacity, and that he will now invite experts from all over the Archdiocese to help manage the finances with transparency. His Eminence set the goal that there would be no confusion concerning the finances, and he asked for patience going forward as he solicits new ideas. He also noted that the Archdiocese had experienced many events since the funeral of Metropolitan PHILIP, including his own enthronement and other

events which have required significant expenditures.

Question from the floor: Mr. Michael Homsey of Oklahoma City, OK, asked, “Will there be a balance sheet that shows everything the Archdiocese holds at the next convention?” His Eminence responded that there would be a balance sheet so that everything would be done with transparency and honesty.

The motion passed and the report was approved.

B. Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2017

Mr. Robert H. Laham, Treasurer, presented the Proposed Budget for Fiscal year 2017.

Mr. Charles Shahadi of Boca Raton, FL, moved to approve the proposed budget, and Dr. Joseph Samra seconded the motion. The motion passed, and the budget was approved.

Questions from the floor: Dr. Elias Hebeka requested clarification concerning line item C9 on page one, books and publications. Both Mr. Laham and Mr. Sameh Khouzam, Comptroller, explained that those items would now be handled by the Antiochian Village, and those items will hereafter appear on that account.

Mr. David Tadross of Little Falls, NJ, asked if the cost of the renovations at the archdiocesan chancery would appear in the operating statement, and he asked if the Archdiocese would receive additional bishops. Metropolitan JOSEPH replied that the cost of the renovations are not operating costs, and that the Archdiocese would welcome new bishops when the time comes.

Dr. Antony Bashir questioned item B3, funding for SCOBA, which no longer exists. Mr. Khouzam explained that the funding was for the bishops’ travel to the Assembly of Bishops, the successor organization of SCOBA. He will change the title on the next report.

Mr. George Elias drew the attention of the General As-

sembly to a forthcoming article in the New York Times Magazine which will explore the world’s lack of support for Christians in the Middle East. Metropolitan JOSEPH referred to the video which Patriarch JOHN had shown, and he asserted the commitment of the Archdiocese to help rebuild the destruction in Syria and to keep people in their homeland. The Archdiocese has given over \$1M, but that amount is not enough. He asked everyone to send checks to archdiocese for that cause.

Mrs. Carol Buleza, Chair of the Department of Christian Education, requested the opportunity for the departments to submit budget proposals next year or as soon as possible.

Metropolitan JOSEPH replied that he has not working on the departments yet. If any department needs more money, he is ready to provide it, provided that the department is performing well.

V. Rev. Fr. Michael Laffoon of Irvine, CA, asked if the Archdiocese had paid its dues to the Assembly of Bishops. Metropolitan JOSEPH responded that our Archdiocese was the first to submit its dues, but that others had not. He also reported that he had offered the Antiochian Village as a meeting place in order to control costs but that some were “allergic” to that location.

IX. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ON REPORTS FROM ARCHDIOCESAN DEPARTMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Fr. George Kevorkian introduced this convention’s experiment of distributing the reports of the archdiocesan departments, institutions and organizations electronically. He read the names of all departments, institutions and organizations.

At this point Metropolitan JOSEPH invited questions for Patriarch JOHN X.

V. Rev. Fr. Iskander Younes of Toronto, ON, asked if cop-

ies of the earlier video were available for distribution in the parishes. His Beatitude responded that the video was on the Facebook page of the Patriarchate and on the archdiocese website.

Fr. Timothy Baclig of Irvine, CA, requested more information in order to provide assistance to families arriving from Syria with needs. His Beatitude directed attention to the website of the Patriarchate as well as to Facebook where there are daily updates. He further highlighted the efforts at the new media center at Patriarchate and in Lebanon to be more active in the media.

Rev. Fr. Milad Selim of Worcester, MA, identified himself as the only actively serving priest of Iraqi descent in the Archdiocese and asked what relief efforts were taking place in Iraq. He also suggested that there be consideration of changing the name of the Syrian Relief Fund to the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East Relief Fund. His Beatitude gave assurance that the Patriarchate is making its best effort to help all refugees. He reported the presence of a church and school in Baghdad and the establishment of a small congregation in the city of Irbil which is under the omophorion of the new metropolitan of Kuwait and the Gulf.

V. Rev. Fr. Anthony Gabriel of Montreal, QC, announced the sponsorship and resettlement of 300 families through the cooperation of the government of Canada.

Metropolitan JOSEPH commented that His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN had been deeply moved in his meeting with the Teens because the Teens did not raise any political issues but only asked one question, “How can we help?”

Bishop Thomas announced that the funeral services for Fr. Gordon Walker would take place on Monday and Tuesday and that the schedule would appear on the Archdiocese website.



The Assembly adjourned at 1:10 PM following a prayer by Patriarch JOHN X.

Friday, July 24, 2015, 10:40 AM

Patriarch JOHN X and Metropolitan JOSEPH opened the session with prayer.

X. SECOND PRESENTATION OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH JOHN X

Patriarch JOHN X offered an extended reflection on the meaning of the Christian life in the contemporary world. His reflection appeared in the September 2015 edition of *The WORD* magazine.

Mr. Alan Abraham of Grand Rapids, MI, moved that on Sunday there be a second collection for Syrian relief in honor of Patriarch JOHN X. The Assembly accepted the motion by acclamation.

XI. RESOLUTIONS, DEPARTMENT OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Esq., Chancellor, presented the first three resolutions to the General Assembly:

RESOLUTION WELCOMING HIS BEATITUDE, JOHN X, PATRIARCH OF THE GREAT CITY OF GOD, ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 52nd Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Boston, Massachusetts;

AND WHEREAS, during the past week we have all joined together in true Christian fellowship with love, respect and unity;

AND WHEREAS, our fellowship this week has been blessed and honored, more so, with the presence of His Beatitude, JOHN X, Patriarch of the Great City of God, Antioch and all the East;

AND WHEREAS, the faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese are cognizant of the extensive turmoil, loss of life and destruction of property that has, and continues to take place, in Syria and its surrounding region as a result of an unjustifiable and needless war that has been instigated by external forces;

AND WHEREAS, the faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese wish to convey to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, that we stand with you, we stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand with our Mother Church, and we stand with all of the Syrian people; that

we share your pain and your sorrows; that we convey our unconditional love to you; that we stand ready and committed and pledge our support to our beloved Church of Antioch, and her faithful members;

AND WHEREAS, the faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese continue to pray that Almighty God will bring everlasting peace to Syria and its inhabitants and that He will continue to protect the Church of Antioch and her faithful;

AND WHEREAS, the faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese, support all decisions made by our Father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X, relative to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which are intended to protect the jurisdictional prerogatives of the Church of Antioch;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, held in Boston, Massachusetts, pledges its undivided support, respect, love, honor, loyalty and obedience to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, our Chief Shepherd in Christ; that we pledge our love and support to our brothers and sisters in Christ; and to our Mother Church; this General Assembly also submits to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our petition, that He grant to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, many more healthy and productive years to come as he leads the Church of Antioch. May Almighty God grant him many years. Eis pola eti, dhespota!

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

RESOLUTION WELCOMING METROPOLITAN SABA, METROPOLITAN DAMASKINOS, METROPOLITAN EPHREM, BISHOP GREGORIOS and BISHOP NICHOLAS

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected, Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 52nd Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention, in Boston, Massachusetts, and are honored to have with us: His Eminence Metropolitan SABA w(Isber), Metropolitan of Bosra, Horan and Jabal al-Arab; His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos (Mansour), Metropolitan of Sao Paulo and all Brazil; His Eminence Metropolitan Ephrem (Kyriakos), Metropolitan of Tripoli, Al-Koura and Dependencies; and His Grace, Bishop Gregorios (Khoury Abdullah), Bishop of the Emirates and Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch; and His Grace, Bishop Nicholas (Baalbeki), Bishop of Bloodan, Syria and Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch;

AND WHEREAS, the General Assembly wishes to ex-

press its love and affection for our honored guests and our willingness to work together with them to the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, held in Boston, Massachusetts, welcomes with warm Christian love our beloved Metropolitan SABA (Isber), Metropolitan Damaskinos (Mansour), Metropolitan Ephrem (Kyriakos), Bishop Gregorios (Khoury Abdullah) and Bishop Nicholas (Baalbeki). May God grant them many years!

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION FOR THE HOST PARISH

WHEREAS, St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church of Cambridge, Massachusetts, has graciously hosted the 52nd Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention;

AND WHEREAS, the Pastor, V. Rev. Fr. Antony Hughes, the Rev. Deacon Jeffrey Smith, the Convention Chairpersons, Mary Winstanley-O'Connor and Raymond Sayeg, the entire Convention Committee, the Parish Council and all the faithful have not spared any effort to assure the success of this Convention and to provide for the utmost enjoyment and spirituality of the delegates and guests;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Boston, Massachusetts from July 20-26, 2015, extends to them by acclamation its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for an outstanding and extraordinary convention.

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

At this point V. Rev. Fr. Thomas Zain, Vicar General, announced that Metropolitan JOSEPH has appointed long-time Board of Trustees members Mr. George Nasoor and Dr. David Bojrab as Honorary Members of the Board of Trustees.

XII. ADDRESS OF METROPOLITAN JOSEPH TO THE CONVENTION

V. Rev. Fr. Thomas Zain introduced His Eminence, Most Reverend Metropolitan JOSEPH, whose address to the General Assembly appeared in the September/October issue of the Word Magazine.

Archdeacon Emil Sayegh, Chancellor, continued the introduction of Resolutions:

RESOLUTION HONORING METROPOLITAN JOSEPH (AL-ZEHLAOUT) AS HE PRESIDES AT HIS FIRST ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 52nd Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Boston Massachusetts;

AND WHEREAS, during the past week we have all joined together in true Christian fellowship with love, respect and unity;

AND WHEREAS, in July, 2014, the Holy Synod of Antioch, elected Archbishop JOSEPH (Al-Zahlaoui) as “Metropolitan” of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, evidencing their utmost trust in the leadership qualities and deep spiritual character of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH;

AND WHEREAS, since assuming the office of “Metropolitan” of North America, Metropolitan JOSEPH, has, and continues to exhibit, his deep love and commitment to this Archdiocese, which is a reflection of his dedicated ministry to Almighty God;

AND WHEREAS, we continue to pray to the Almighty God that he grant His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH many more healthy, productive and joyful years, as he continues to lead this God-protected Archdiocese, as its Metropolitan Archbishop and as its Chief Shepherd of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, the first over which His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH (Al-Zehlaoui) presides, bestows upon him, its undivided respect, love, honor, loyalty and obedience; this General Assembly also submits to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our petition that He grant to His Eminence many more healthy and productive years to come as he leads this Archdiocese. May God grant you many years, Master!

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

RESOLUTION APPEALING TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO BROKER LASTING PEACE BASED UPON FAIRNESS IN SYRIA

WHEREAS, the Country of Syria has been victimized by a ravaging war for almost the past five years;

AND WHEREAS on April 22, 2013, now over two years ago, two Orthodox Archbishops were abducted in the

suburbs of Aleppo, and their whereabouts continues to remain a mystery not having received any information from their abductors;

AND WHEREAS, in the recent past, members of the clergy have been murdered and houses of worship desecrated and destroyed by armed militants opposing the government of Syria;

AND WHEREAS, many citizens of Syria have demanded civil liberties, democratic values and economic stability;

AND WHEREAS, as a result of this illegitimate war countless lives have been lost, and millions of Syrian citizens have been forced to flee their homes and reduced to the status of refugees and are now seeking refuge in Lebanon, Jordan and other parts of the world; there has been tens of billions of dollars in property damage and the country of Syria, a cradle of the beginning of civilization, now lies in ruins;

AND WHEREAS, foreign countries have been meddling in the affairs of Syria, and thousands of foreign militants have come to Syria bringing pillage, death and destruction;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Boston, Massachusetts from July 20-26, 2015, hereby calls upon the governments of the United States, England, France, Germany, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to cease supplying the militants who oppose the government of Syria, with the means of destruction; We call upon the Syrian government and all militant opposition forces to cease any further conflict and bring an immediate end to this bloodshed and engage in peaceful dialogue in order to spare the further loss of innocent lives of the Syrian citizens; We call upon our United States Government to cease supplying additional weapons and arms to the militant opposition forces and to be the catalyst for a lasting peace for the sake of the citizens of Syria and stability in the region and international peace.

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

RESOLUTION TO OPPOSE THE RECENT UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISION THAT LEGALLY RE-DEFINED MARRIAGE TO INCLUDE TWO PEOPLE OF THE SAME SEX

WHEREAS, on June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court, in the case entitled “Obergefell, et al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al.”, by a marginal majority decision, held that no State may deny same-sex couples the right to marry. In so doing, the Supreme Court has legally re-defined, the sacred and

long-held profundity of the meaning of marriage;

WHEREAS, the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, under the direct leadership of his Eminence, Metropolitan Archbishop JOSEPH (Al-Zehlaoui), and the hierarchy of the Archdiocese, continues to shepherd its faithful members throughout all of North America, and as such, are deeply concerned about the recent developments regarding “same sex marriage;”

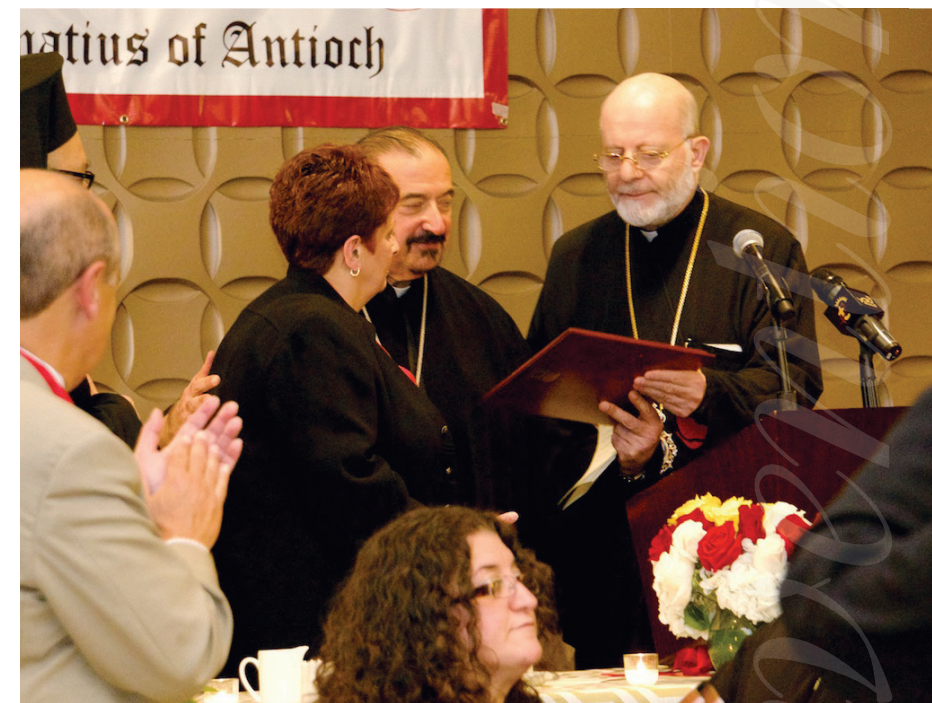
WHEREAS, the Holy Orthodox Church recognizing marriage to be a fundamental sacrament and institution, ordained only by God Himself, and teaching that marriage and sexuality, which are firmly grounded in Holy Scripture, two thousand years of church tradition, and canon law, hereby holds that marriage consists in the conjugal union of one man and one woman and that authentic marriage is blessed by Almighty God as a Holy Sacrament of the Church;

WHEREAS, the Holy Scripture attests that God created man and woman in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27-31), that those called to do so might enjoy a conjugal union that ideally leads to procreation. While not every marriage is blessed with the birth of children, every such union exists to create of a man and a woman a new reality of “one flesh.” This can be achieved only in a relationship between individuals of opposite gender. “God made them male and female... So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:6-8);

WHEREAS, the Holy Orthodox Church also teaches that the union between one man and one woman in the Sacrament of Marriage reflects the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). As such, marriage is necessarily monogamous and heterosexual. Within this union, sexual relations between a husband and wife are to be cherished and protected as a sacred expression of their love that has been blessed by God. Such is God’s plan for His human creatures from the very beginning;

WHEREAS, the Holy Orthodox Church is cognizant that God’s divine purpose is increasingly questioned and diminished, i.e., challenged or denied, by a society influenced by secularism, relativism, and social and political pressures which have been working to normalize and legalize “same sex” unions;

WHEREAS, it is our duty to express Christian love that is honest and charitable, recognizing the struggles of all people from all kinds of sin, we encourage each other toward sexual purity. “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). We encourage all Christians to always speak in charity and



love, without denigration or mockery towards anyone. All persons must be treated with respect and kindness while being called to living a Godly life;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 52nd Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Boston, Massachusetts, from July 20-26, 2015, resolves and reaffirms through the clergy and laity of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, that Christ by His presence at the Marriage Feast of Cana in Galilee declared marriage between one man and one woman an honorable estate; that all Christians be lovingly called to sexual purity, holiness and repentance; that marriage cannot be re-defined as a union between same sex couples and that no sexual activity outside of the Sacrament of Marriage, between one man and one woman be blessed; and that the Orthodox Church cannot and will not condone nor bless “same sex” unions of any degree. It is further resolved that marriage between one man and one woman is a sacred sacrament and institution ordained by God, and that homosexual unions are not; however, this being said, we must stress that a person with a homosexual orientation is to be cared for with the same compassion and love that is bestowed by our Lord Jesus Christ upon all persons. We are all called by God to strive toward holiness.

The Assembly approved the resolution by acclamation.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:55 PM with prayer by Patriarch JOHN X.



The Assembly reconvened at 2:35 PM.

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH INVITED QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR ABOUT THE REPORTS OF THE DEPARTMENTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE PREVIOUSLY DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY.

In response to a question from the floor, Ms. Carol Buleza, Chair, Department of Christian Education, confirmed plans to revise the Church School curriculum pending the approval of a proposal for funding, as stated in her report.

His Grace Bishop ANTOUN noted in the report of the Department of Clergy Insurance that the switch to a Health Savings Account (HSA) model had lowered monthly premiums, but deductibles for participants had increased. Fr. Michael Ellias, Chairman, confirmed the change but added that a portion of the premium would cover certain initial claims. Fr. Elia Shalhoub requested that the next edition of the Clergy Compensation Manual direct parishes to apply their premium savings to the clergy's increased expenses.

Mr. Joseph Samra of Pawtucket, RI, asked the Department of Conference and Convention Planning if there would be enhancements to the models of the conferences and conventions to increase family involvement. Mr. Raed Sweiss, Co-Chair, responded that there would be enhancements for 2017, but he noted that some dioceses do not have coordinators; nonetheless, work will continue to enhance the schedule.

Fr. David Meyer of West Chester, PA, requested a brief summary of the work of the Department of Home Schooling. Fr. Noah Bushelli, Chairman, highlighted the

need for Orthodox parents to raise their children in the faith in our post-Christian environment. He stressed the need for home schooling parents to leverage co-ops involving their parishes and other families. He also identified the need for parents to debrief children in the public schools daily.

Fr. David Lewis of Carrollton, TX, asked what the major expenditures were for the Department of Internet Ministry. On behalf of the department Fr. George Kevorkian indicated that 70% of the budget covered salaries, infrastructure and web hosting.

Mr. Johnathan Corey of Syracuse, NY, asked if the Department of Internet Ministry were coordinating with the Department of Youth and Parish Ministries. He stressed the importance of infiltrating the social media. V. Rev. Fr. Joseph Purpura, Chairman of the Department of Youth, indicated that the Teens were very active in this area, and that he is encouraging Metropolitan JOSEPH to do much more. He recognized the need to coordinate with the Department of Internet Ministry.

Fr. George Rados, Co-Chair of the Department of Charities, rose to promote the Children's Relief Fund because the Department is receiving increased requests for sponsorships. He encouraged every parish as well as individual donors to sponsor at least one child.

Fr. Michael Nasser, pastor of Holy Apostles Mission, Bowling Green, KY, expressed his appreciation for the work of the Department of Missions and Evangelism and asked how the Department of Lay Ministries might help missions grow.

Dr. Anthony S. Bashir, Co-Chair of the Department of Lay Ministries, responded that the Department is addressing the need for mission statements, core values

statements and action plans which are Christ-centered. He also noted joint efforts with the Department of Stewardship in order to provide a wider range of offerings. He also indicated a plan to cooperate with the Department of Missions to make proposal to create a continuum of offerings from first contact with a potential new community through the realization of a fully developed parish.

Ms. Fadia Juzdan, President of the Antiochian Women of the Dioceses of New York and Washington, DC, and Charleston, Oakland and the Mid-Atlantic, noted the absence of a budget for the Department of Marriage and Parish Family Ministry in the archdiocesan budget.

Kh. Maggie Hock, Director of the Department of Marriage and Parish Family Ministry, responded that the Depart-

ment is still functioning but without a budget for travel. He also noted joint efforts with the Department of Stewardship in order to provide a wider range of offerings. He also indicated a plan to cooperate with the Department of Missions to make proposal to create a continuum of offerings from first contact with a potential new community through the realization of a fully developed parish.

Metropolitan JOSEPH commended Bishop John on the excellent work of *The WORD* magazine and asked each hierarch to write substantive submissions. He also asked for reports on the activity of the parishes, noting that *The WORD* was the voice of the Archdiocese. *The WORD* is the platform for parishes and parishioners to express themselves.

Ms. Darlene Haddad of Cicero, IL, asked what is hap-



ment is still functioning but without a budget for travel.

Jasminka Gabrie of Los Angeles, CA, requested that Metropolitan JOSEPH repeat the brief comments he made after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday at the Sacred Music Institute at the Antiochian Village concerning the relationship between chanters and choirs in the divine services.

Metropolitan JOSEPH recounted that there is a need for a good choir whether using Byzantine or western music. The need is for a "heavenly choir" in whatever style we may excel. He emphasized that music is a tool for worship, but we do not have to sanctify the music itself.

Mr. Kamal Hourani, incoming President of the North American Council of the Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations (SOYO), asked if there were a projected completion date for the edit of the "Kazan music project."

Mr. Paul Jabara, Chair of the Department of Sacred Mu-

pening with the Fellowship of St. John the Divine.

Mr. Khalil Samara, President of the North American Council of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, responded that over the past two years there has been a comprehensive study of the needs of the Fellowship and of SOYO. He noted that each diocese is different, but similar themes emerged. There will still be an administrative role for areas such as the creative festivals, scholarships, mission councils, etc. The emphasis going forward, however, will be on programs for young adults. The restructuring proposal is outlined in his report to the General Assembly and is available on the archdiocesan website. The Fellowship has received the blessing of the Metropolitan to restructure and to transition to the new format. While the Creative Festivals will fall under their corresponding departments, the same volunteers will continue to manage the Bible Bowl and Oratorical



to his office. He stressed that there should be no unanswered questions and no gossip. The Archdiocese is open for everyone to get answers. He thanked Mrs. Violet Robbat for her four years of service as president of the Antiochian Women.

In his closing remarks Fawaz El Khoury added his own thanks to Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, and he introduced Mr. Roger David as incoming Chairman of the Order. He also introduced Dianne M. O'Regan as the incoming President of the Antiochian Women, Mr. Jordan Kurzum as the outgoing President of the North American Council of SOYO, and Mr. Kamal Hourani as the incoming President. He noted that Mr. Khalil Samara will remain in office during the transition of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine.

Metropolitan JOSEPH recognized Archdeacon Hans Elhayek and Ms. Almaza Farhat who have retired after many years of faithful service to the Archdiocese.



B. Bids for the 2019 Archdiocese Convention

Mr. Raed Sweiss and Ms. Carol Jazzar, Co-Chairs, Department of Convention and Conference Planning, introduced three bids to host the 2019 Archdiocese Convention in order of their submission:

St. Luke Church of Garden Grove, CA: Fr. Michael Tassos, Pastor, introduced a video presentation and the "Top Ten Reasons to go to Palm Desert."

St. Nicholas Church of Grand Rapids, MI: Mr. Alan Abraham introduced Fathers Dan Daly and Michael Nasser and their organizing committee with a video presentation.

St. George Church of Indianapolis, IN: Fr. Nabil Hanna, Pastor, introduced a video presentation and a representative of the Indianapolis Convention Bureau.

C. Report of the Nominating Committee

Rt. Rev. Bishop NICHOLAS, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, directed Fr. George Kevorkian to read



Contest. The former college ministry will now become a young adult ministry under the guidance of Fr. Anthony Yazge under same structure you have now.

Very Rev. Fr. Timothy Baclig, pastor of St. Michael's Church, Van Nuys, CA, expressed gratitude on behalf of the clergy to the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch for its ongoing support of the clergy retirement fund.

Mr. Roger David, incoming National Chairman of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch thanked Ms. Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, outgoing National Chairman of the Order for her dedicated service and for helping him transfer into office.

In his closing remarks Metropolitan JOSEPH encouraged people to ask questions in writing and to send them



XIII. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

XIV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Report on the 2017 Archdiocese Convention – Miami, FL

Rev. Fr. Fouad Saba, Pastor of St. George Cathedral, Coral Gables, FL, introduced the organizing committee for the 2017 Archdiocese Convention in Miami, FL. The room rate at the Diplomat Hotel will be \$189 per night with free "wifi" and \$15 per night parking. A full description of beach and hotel amenities is available on the convention website. A booth is available at this convention to register for the convention. A video presentation featured His Grace, Rt. Rev. Bishop ANTOUN.

a brief biography of all the nominees for election to the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. All nominees appeared before the Assembly.

D. Election of Members of the Board of Trustees and 2019 Convention Site

Fr. Kevorkian instructed the Assembly on the procedure for voting, which took place as the delegates exited the hall.

Fr. Thomas Zain announced the availability of a new book by Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory and his brother, Dr. Najib Saliba, entitled Broken Promises and White House Meetings. All proceeds will benefit the Archdiocese.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

DECEMBER 2015
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

1. 1 TIMOTHY 5:11-21; LUKE 19:45-48 (FAST)
2. 1 TIMOTHY 5:22-6:11; LUKE 20:1-8 (FAST)
3. 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-21; LUKE 20:9-18 (FAST)
4. GALATIANS 3:23-29; MARK 5:24-34 (FAST)
5. GALATIANS 5:22-6:2; LUKE 12:32-40 (FAST)
6. HEBREWS 13:17-21; LUKE 13:10-17 (FAST)
7. 2 TIMOTHY 2:20-26; LUKE 20:27-44 (FAST)
8. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-4:4; LUKE 21:12-19 (FAST)
9. GALATIANS 4:22-31; LUKE 8:16-21 (FAST)
10. TITUS 1:5-2:1; LUKE 21:28-33 (FAST)
11. TITUS 1:15-2:10; LUKE 21:37-22:8 (FAST)
12. HEBREWS 13:17-21; LUKE 56:17-23 (FAST)
13. COLOSSIANS 3:4-11; LUKE 14:16-24 (FAST)
14. HEBREWS 3:5-11, 17-19; MARK 8:11-21 (FAST)
15. HEBREWS 4:1-13; MARK 8:22-26 (FAST)
16. HEBREWS 5:11-6:8; MARK 8:30-34 (FAST)
17. HEBREWS7:1-6; MARK 9:10-16 (FAST)
18. HEBREWS 7:18-25; MARK 9:3-41 (FAST)
19. GALATIANS 3:8-12; LUKE 13:18-29 (FAST)
20. HEBREWS 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40; MATTHEW 1:1-25 (FAST)
21. HEBREWS 8:7-13; MARK 9:42-10:1 (FAST)
22. HEBREWS 9:8-10, 15-23; MARK 10:2-12 (FAST)
23. HEBREWS 10:1-18; MARK 10:11-16 (FAST)
24. HEBREWS 1:1-12; LUKE 2:1-20 (FAST)
25. GALATIANS 4:4-7; MATTHEW 2:1-12 THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD
26. HEBREWS 2:11-18; MATTHEW 2:13-23
27. ACTS 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60; MATTHEW 2:13-23
28. HEBREWS 11:17-23, 27-31; MARK 10:46-52
29. HEBREWS 12:25-26; 13:22-25; MARK 11:11-23
30. JAMES 1:1-8; MARK 11:23-26
31. JAMES 1:19-27; MARK 11:27-33

E. Metropolitan JOSEPH’s appointments of Board of Trustees Members

His Eminence announced that he would make his appointments to the Board of Trustees and confirm the election results following the Divine Liturgy in the morning.

His Eminence appointed Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, St. George Cathedral, Worcester, MA; Mr. Mansour Rayan, St. George Church, Cicero, IL; Ms. Mary Winstanley-O’Connor, Cambridge, MA; Mr. Richard Ayoub, St. Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA; and Ms. Kelli Kouri Neagle, Saints Constantine and Helen Church, Carrollton, TX.

The Assembly elected Mr. Daniel Abraham, St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, MI; Mr. Edward Assile, St. Anthony Church, Bergenfield, NJ; Mr. Dan Braun, St. Athanasius Church, Goleta, CA; Dr. John Dalack, St. Mary’s Church, Brooklyn, NY; Ms. Darlene Haddad, St. George Church, Cicero, IL; Dr. Raymond Rishwain, St. John Church, Orinda, CA; Mr. Douglas Skaff, St. George Cathedral, Charleston, WV; Dr. George Thomas, St. Luke Mission, Chagrin Falls, OH; Mr. Rami Younes, St. George Church, Toronto, ON; and Mr. Dimitri Zeidan, St. Elias Cathedral, Ottawa, ON.

The Assembly awarded the 2019 Archdiocese Convention to St. Nicholas Church of Grand Rapids, MI.

XV. ADJOURNMENT AND CLOSING PRAYER

His Grace Bishop ANTOUN moved to adjourn. Mr. Salim Abboud seconded the motion. The motion passed, and His Eminence closed the General Assembly with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
V. Rev. Fr. Michael Elias, Secretary
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

Official
JUBILEE CELEBRATION
of the
REPOSE OF
ST. RAPHAEL OF BROOKLYN

November 6–7
St. Nicholas Cathedral, Brooklyn, NY

His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH
will preside at all of the services.

Guest Speaker – Archpriest Chad Hatfield
Chancellor of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary

Great Vespers and Artoklasia
Friday, November 6, 7:00 p.m.

Orthros and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy
Saturday, November 7, 9:15 and 10:30 a.m.

LITURGICAL DISCIPLESHIP:
A Framework For Youth Ministry

Gregory Abdalah, M.Div., Youth Director

A traditional method of youth ministry looks at youth as vital to the growth of the Church, because the Church needs her youth to become the next generation of church leaders – lay and ordained. Unfortunately, the trend is for a great number of Orthodox youth to leave their churches after high school. To reverse this trend, Church organizations must cultivate and nurture Orthodoxy as an integral part of the lives of parishioners from a young age. To that end, we will identify the primary goals of Youth Ministry as follows:

1. To provide an environment within which our youth can encounter Christ.
2. To create an atmosphere that facilitates the development of their personal relationships with Christ.
3. Once a relationship with Christ has been developed, to provide opportunities for the fostering of that relationship.

Many of our youth see that our society breaks down community rather than building it up. They express an immense need for community, and seek it, something outside of themselves, somewhere they belong, a safe haven in which they can be themselves, free of judgment or ridicule from their peers. These interactions are happening in cyberspace: Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, video game chats, and so on. I recently saw an advertisement for the popular online video game, “Game of War,” that actually focused on the chat features the game has to offer, not the video game itself. Our youth are seeking out community wherever they can find them, not knowing where to look.

By her very definition, the Church is community. Within this community, we maintain our individuality but are joined together as one, serving different functions and purposes. As St. Paul states in 1 Corinthians, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12–13). To that end, in the liturgy of Saint Basil, we ask that the Eucharist unite us to God and to each other. Within this body, we come to know God by coming to know each other.

The Body of Christ described by Paul is the *ecclesia*

tou theou (“the called out, or gathered, belonging to God”), the assembly of God. This assembly is gathered not simply to have fun – it is defined by its purpose and its “ownership,” that is, God. It is within this very specific gathering – the Divine Liturgy – that we fully come to know God and, most importantly, to experience Him as those who belong to Him. It is through our Divine Services that Christ enters into a relationship with each of us and fosters it. This relationship becomes our response to His call to discipleship and is expressed through our participation in the Divine Services. We will call this “liturgical discipleship.” Our participation in the Divine Services, the vehicle for our Liturgical Discipleship, follows our initiation into the Body of Christ. In his book, *Of Water and the Spirit*, Fr. Schmemmann speaks of the three-fold nature of this initiation: Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist.¹

To understand what role this liturgical discipleship might play in the lives of our youth, we have first to understand the religious landscape within which they live and function. Sociologist Christian Smith undertook a study in which he interviewed teenagers from around the United States, asking them questions about their religious beliefs.² His categories included “Conservative Protestant,” “Methodist,” “Mainline Protestant,” “Black Protestant,” “Catholic,” “Jewish,” “Mormon,” “Other Religion” and “Not Religious.”³ When the dust settled, he summarized his findings in the following way:

The de facto dominant religion among contemporary teenagers in the United States is what we might call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” The creed of this religion, as codified from what emerged from our interviews with U.S. teenagers, sounds something like this:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and



watches over human life on earth.

2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.⁴

It would be easy for us to say: “Surely our youth know better,” but do they? The chief source of their knowledge, and that which forms them religiously and theologically, is the liturgy. Liturgy should be life-giving for *all* Orthodox Christians – the young included. We therefore need to engage our youth fully within the liturgical life of the Church. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann places liturgy “at the center of the Church’s life and activity.”⁵ This makes liturgy the guiding force in a Christian life. As we build up our youth to be members of the Church, to have their own community within the parish community, the Liturgical Life becomes the center of that community. It is, then, within this scope that we can begin to help them

having put Him on through baptism, having received the Holy Spirit through anointing with Holy Chrism, and as initiates into the Royal Priesthood, the neophyte *needs* the Eucharist to consummate his or her new life and, from the very beginning, to be strengthened. It is not merely a confirmation, or a symbol: it is the ultimate step in fully expressing liturgical discipleship. Schmemmann draws this line clearly in this way: it is “the gift of the Holy Spirit that ‘opens’ to us access to the Church, to Christ’s table in His Kingdom.” “We are baptized so that we might receive the Holy Spirit; we receive the Holy Spirit so that we may become living members of the Body of Christ, growing within the Church into the fullness of Christ’s stature.”⁶

This line, “growing within the Church into the fullness of Christ stature,” requires some explanation. This third aspect of liturgical discipleship continues throughout our lives. Expressing discipleship is not something that is done once and forgotten. It is ongoing. Living a life within the Church is living a life in communion with others and with God; in other words, it is placing liturgy at the center of our lives. It means to live a life of

By her very definition, the Church is community. Within this community, we maintain our individuality but are joined together as one, serving different functions and purposes.

to realize their Liturgical Discipleship. To properly bring our youth into that reality of their Liturgical Discipleship, we return to the three-fold structure of their initiation, described above. Considering each from the viewpoint of Liturgical Discipleship, we would understand them as Baptism (the roots of Liturgical Discipleship), Chrismation (the sign of Liturgical Discipleship); and Eucharist (the expression of Liturgical Discipleship). A full discussion would require an exploration of all three, but limitations of space require that we focus only on the last, the Eucharist.

Eucharist: The Expression of Liturgical Discipleship

From the very first time they receive Holy Communion, the new initiate receives the Eucharist in the same manner as everyone else. There are no special prayers; there is no difference in distribution. The initiate, or his or her sponsor, says the prayer before communion and “receive[s] the body and blood of Lord Jesus Christ for remission of sins and unto life everlasting.” It could be argued that, having entered into a relationship Christ,

sacrificial offering, a life of love. As initiates of Christ, we too must become as Christ is described in the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom: the “offerer and the offering.”

In much of the Patristic writings, particularly those of St. Ignatius of Antioch, this is the essential connection between being and life. To be a Christian means to live a life of offering. On his way to his martyrdom, Ignatius urges his disciples in Rome to “leave me to be bread for the wild beasts, through which I may be able to attain to God.” “I am God’s wheat and through the beasts’ teeth I shall be found to be pure bread for Christ.... Then I shall truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁷ Later, in Chapter 6, he refers to his death as a birth and says, “the birth-pangs are laid upon me.... Do not hinder me from living.”⁸ Fr. John Behr interprets Ignatius’s description of his martyrdom as birth as “a birth in which he becomes a ‘human being’ – a human being in the stature of Christ the ‘perfect human being’ or the ‘new human being.’”⁹ For Ignatius, fully offering himself to God in martyrdom was the ultimate expression of his discipleship and

his becoming human, a life lived in communion with God. Regarding this connection, Metropolitan JOHN (Zizioulas) of Pergamon poses the following question and answer: “What was it among the Greek Fathers that made it possible to identify being with life? Their common experience of the Church is that of a community; specifically a *Eucharistic* community. The role played by the Eucharist in the theology of Ignatius is so decisive that it would be surprising if it had not had an influence on this identification of existence with life.”¹⁰

For Zizioulas, living within a Eucharistic community – living in relationship with Christ and with each other as the Body of Christ – is intrinsically linked to our discipleship and is the expression of our Liturgical Discipleship. He goes on to say, “The life of the Eucharist is the life of God Himself, but this is not life in the sense of an Aristotelian movement which flows out mechanically from the interior of existence. It is the life of *communion* with God, such as exists within the Trinity and is actualized within the members of the Eucharistic community.”¹¹ This communion, this reality of love, is made possible through Christ’s Incarnation, His taking on flesh that, in turn, allows us to put Him on. After being called, His Disciples were taught and then sent out to baptize and teach, allowing for our initiation into the Body of Christ, our putting on of Christ and our anointing with the Spirit. The Anaphora of St. Basil explains the process in this way:

Albeit He was God before all the ages, yet He appeared upon earth and dwelt among men; and was incarnate of a Holy Virgin, and did empty Himself, taking on the form of a servant, and becoming conformed to the fashion of our lowliness ... that they who were dead in Adam might be made alive in Thy Christ. And becoming a citizen of this world and giving commandments of salvation, he released us from the delusion of idols and brought us into a knowledge of Thee, the true God and Father, having won us unto himself for his own people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... having purified us by water and having sanctified us by the Holy Spirit.¹²

These prayers of offering serve as a reminder that we are to live a life of offering. As Fr. Robert Taft bluntly states, “The [anaphora] prayers aren’t for God. God knows them all already; liturgical prayers are for us.”¹³ This becomes difficult for us because these prayers are counter-cultural, as our culture does not honor self-sacrifice – offering – but encourages and breeds narcissism. *Offering vs. Narcissism*

Youth, generally speaking, are narcissistic, and each successive generation seems to be more and more so.

Our Orthodox youth are not immune. This narcissism is expressed in the notions of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), discussed above. This narcissism is also fed by MTD: God is there when we need Him, and will take care of us, but I can just go about my daily life as though He doesn’t exist. How do we live a life of offering, a life of selfless love, within a society that teaches and nurtures narcissism and entitlement? More pointedly, how can we even begin to think that we can live this life with a Eucharistic understanding of Liturgical Discipleship? To begin, let us make some brief observations:

1. By narcissism, we mean self-centeredness, not the personality disorder.
2. Narcissism is a lonely pattern of behavior; it is an expression of loneliness, not an expression of arrogance.
3. Narcissism can be a defense mechanism that shields those who are socially awkward and insecure from uncomfortable interactions with others.
4. Today’s narcissism is a direct result of the self-esteem movement of the 1980’s and has done more damage than good.
5. The advances of technology and the focus of today’s society on Social Media, further complicates narcissistic tendencies by encouraging them.

By living life with a Eucharistic understanding, we begin a process that destroys narcissism. “The thanksgiving [*anaphora*] offered by the Church each time answers and destroys precisely this not only contemporary but age-old lie about the world and man In thanksgiving we recognize and confess above all the divine source and the divine calling of our life.”¹⁴ More simply put, Bishop JOHN of Worcester often reminds the youth of his diocese that “we are all called to Bring God to the world and the world to God.” This begins to break down the notions associated with narcissism, as it focuses on the corporate and communal nature of our being, while appealing to individual responsibility. Beginning with the raising up of the gifts at the Anaphora, we can begin to see this process unraveling. As Webber points out, “The place of the deacon...is noteworthy. At this sacred moment, the bishop takes a step back The bread and the wine are actually held by the deacon, who has that distinct role in the Church – not quite a priest, not quite a layman, but in some sense both. He, uniquely, presents the gifts on behalf of the whole world.”¹⁵ During a moment that many would consider the “high point” of the Divine Liturgy, the bishop takes the focus away from himself and places the gifts in the hands of a deacon; the one who stands in the midst of the people, as one of the

people, offering the prayers of the people.

Additionally, the gifts are offered on behalf of all and for all. This is not done on behalf of Sue and for Bill or on behalf of Orthodox Christians and for Orthodox Christians; this is *for* the entire world, *on behalf of* the entire world. With the gifts, we are then elevating the whole world towards God. This is a marked difference from prayer done in our rooms with the door closed.¹⁶This offering is done so we might be fed, and subsequently strengthened, to do the work we are called to do in our baptism – to follow Christ’s commandment to love one another. Through the Eucharist, narcissism is broken down so that we might adopt St. Ignatius’ words as our own. Put another way: “Every baptized Christian, therefore, is a sign of God’s presence in the world. This is affirmed by Scripture, realized in the liturgy, and must be lived out in the world. Every Christian is a priest, called to bring God’s divine love and forgiveness to a world which lives in sin and darkness. Every Christian is called to this priestly, mediatory task.”¹⁷

This can be uncomfortable for some, and understandably so. Once, I even had a priest ask me, “If we are all priests, what makes me special?” Meyendorff provides this response: “The primary function of priesthood is to offer sacrifices and to serve as the intermediary between God and humanity.”¹⁸ Recognition of the royal priesthood that comes with baptism does not discount or undermine the ordained priesthood and its liturgical function. Rather, this understanding of the royal priesthood empowers the laity and supports the ministry of ordained clergy. It invites the laity to embrace the liturgy and take ownership liturgically in a way that becomes life-giving for them and increases participation and attentiveness. Meyendorff continues, “In liturgy, this [priestly] function is exercised not by the bishop or presbyter alone, but by Jesus Christ, the high priest who offered himself up once and for all, or by the entire assembly, which is the corporate Body of Christ.”¹⁹ This, of course, only works if the laity makes the effort to accept their role within the royal priesthood and begin to exercise that priesthood.

This is often seen as an overstatement, but such a reaction may be selling our laity short. Such a sentiment may stem more from the insecurity of clergy than from reality. Rather than focusing on the discomfort that may be generated by this line of thinking on the royal priesthood, let us consider some applications of Liturgical Discipleship for youth ministry.

Applications for Youth Ministry

In a recent video on the website *Pemptousia*, Fr. Alexander Rentel states: “We take the simple equation of ‘O

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever.’ If we break that down, if we actualize it ... [there is] renewed emphasis on being present at the divine services, celebrating the divine services, participating in the divine services – not only singing or moving or doing – but actually participating in them the way that we are intended; by offering ourselves, by offering a sacrifice of praise, by giving glory to God, by blessing God – in other words, becoming humans.”²⁰ To put it more simply, my mother would say, “Liturgy is joy. Why would we keep that joy away from our youth?” As we pray in the very beginning of the Baptismal service: “That [he] may render praise unto Thee, may sing, worship and glorify Thy great and exalted Name always, all the days of [his] life.”²¹

This all makes sense and is beautiful in theory, but what are the practical applications? We must first face reality. Our youth are bombarded with so many distractions for their time and attention, and the Church is not going to win that competition. Thanks to advances in modern technology, they no longer need to talk to each other face-to-face. There is less socializing and an increase in a sense of entitlement. The more we have, the more we think we are owed. Values like compassion, sacrifice and love are being lost at a rapid and startling rate. As time has gone on and we have “progressed,” our youth have been pulled away from Sunday worship by soccer, baseball, basketball, and jobs. In this post-Christian world, our kids are being distracted from God each day and told to turn their attention elsewhere. This is not to make excuses or to advocate that we should “throw in the towel”; we just need to be honest about what we are up against. When speaking of Orthodoxy in America, we often say things like, “the Church is not needed the way it once was,” and “people do not need the Church the way they did in the early days.” By that, we mean that the central role the community played in the social and cultural lives of members has changed, and perhaps this is true. Today, people’s social lives are centered elsewhere – golf clubs, PTA, the soccer field – and that is fine. The Church was never intended to be a cultural or social club. The Church is so much more. We must ask ourselves, have we adequately prepared and taught our youth to understand this? It is time to face the reality that our youth are not staying in the Church because their parents were not taught how to be disciples when they were young, and did not, in turn, teach their children the faith or how to be disciples.

Returning to the Great Commission: Christ commands the disciples not simply to “make disciples of all

nations,” but to *teach*. Those of us entrusted to do youth work would be remiss if we forgot that, first and foremost, we are called to this same duty. Before the disciples could make disciples and teach, they had first to *become* disciples and *learn*. After we accept Christ’s call and become disciples and learn, then we might go and make disciples and teach. Our educational efforts are essential in helping our youth understand their Liturgical Discipleship. Instruction must be provided for parents (and even some clergy) as well. This is not going to be an easy process, as a shift in thinking comes with it.

What might this instruction look like? When debriefing an activity on a ropes course (a personal development and team-building activity using ropes), facilitators are taught to center the discussion on three questions: What? So What? Now What? Our educational efforts may also begin with these same three questions. These discussions might take the following form:

1. What? *You were baptized*

Many of our youth understand what baptism is, but another way to look at this is as a *washing*. Through baptism, we are washed. Just as when we shower or bathe, washing cleanses us. In baptism, we are purified from the all the muck and mire of the world and put on white clothes that we are called to keep clean. There are many scriptural passages to which one can refer for parallels – for example, the washing of the disciples feet found in John 13:1-20. Furthermore, in baptism we are also *initiated*, we enter into Christ’s dying to the fallen world and becoming “little christs” (Christians).

2. So What? *You were chrismated*

Chrismation is a funny word for youth, and *anointing* has lost its meaning, in many ways. We might use the word “branded.” Our baptism is sealed through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are “marked” as God’s – as understood through the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

3. Now What? *Receive the Body of Christ*

This is where the real fun discussions can happen. It is through this lens that we teach about what the Eucharist is, what it means to be members of the body of Christ, what it means to be in community, and what it means to love one another. There are so many tools at our disposal for this discussion that there is not enough space to list them all. Of note are Matthew 25:14-30 and 31-46; 1 Corinthians 11:20-26 and 12:14-13:13; and Galatians 6:1-10. It is important to focus on the communal nature of Eucharist and the social relations found within these passages.

It might seem that we are playing to young peoples’ inherent narcissism, and in some ways we are. Their desire for contrived community may be a masked yearning for true community – which is found in the Church, as discussed above. Their desire to feel good about themselves is a great hook for outreach activities that, in turn, help us understand the Eucharist.

Given our understanding of MTD and the tendency of our youth towards narcissism, outreach activities become an invaluable tool in bringing youth to God. Outreach activities are a prime opportunity for helping our youth understand liturgy. They are a discussion-starter, pointing us towards liturgy and an understanding of our Liturgical Discipleship. During the debriefing of these activities, specifically, we can focus on this as our response to Christ’s command to “love one another.” Currently, there is a strain of thought within Orthodoxy that speaks of the “liturgy after the liturgy”²² – bringing the Eucharistic experience found within the gathering of the community out into the community at large.²³ Roman Catholic missionary, Fr. Vincent J. Donovan, took this further by translating the closing of the Mass from “the Mass is ended, go in peace,” to “go to it, the Mass.”²⁴ The nuance found in this distinction has wonderful implications when explaining outreach to our youth.

We are blessed in the United States that there are many fantastic programs focusing on youth outreach, most notably the Youth Equipped to Serve Program – YES! – of FOCUS North America.²⁵ The effect that participation in a YES! program has on youth is astounding. Personally, I have seen participants renew their commitment to liturgical worship, give someone their shoes, and come out of their shells, and begin to become who they are called to be.

In addition to the YES! program, there is an office at Hellenic College dedicated to the exploration of vocation. On its website, the Office of Vocation and Ministry (OVM) describes itself as a place that “trains and educates faithful, energetic, high-achieving, and service-oriented Orthodox Christian young people to be leaders in the church as priests and lay people.”²⁶ They quite deliberately define vocation as “one’s unique and ongoing response to Christ’s call to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and the neighbor as oneself.”²⁷ In addition to their work with Hellenic College, the OVM sponsors the CrossRoad program, a ten-day program in which rising High School juniors and seniors explore their vocation through academic courses, group discussions, and outreach ministry. Unlike camping programs, CrossRoad staff train for an entire semester in

FOOTNOTES

1. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, pp. 115-116.
2. Christian Smith is a sociologist and Director of the National Study of Youth and Religion, a research project funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.
3. Smith, *Soul Searching*, pp. 308–310.
4. Smith, *On “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”*
5. Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition*, p. 55
6. Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 116.
7. Ignatius, Romans 4:1-2.
8. *Ibid.*, 6:1-2.
9. Behr, *Becoming Human*, p. 4.
10. Zizoulas, *Being as Communion*, pp. 80-81.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
12. *Service Book*, AOCANA, pp. 136-137.
13. Taft, *Through Their Own Eyes*, p. 124.
14. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, p. 185.
15. Webber, *Bread & Water, Wine & Oil*, pp. 143-144.
16. Matthew 6:6.
17. Meyendorff, *Priesthood of the Laity*, p. 222.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Fr. Alexander Rentel, “Divine Worship in Orthodox Tradition.”
21. *Service Book*, AOCANA, p. 147.
22. Bria, “The Liturgy After The Liturgy.”
23. Our liturgy even goes so far as to tell us “to go forth in peace.”
24. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, p. 96.
25. For more information, visit: <https://focusnorthamerica.org/yes/>
26. <http://www.hchc.edu/studentlife/vocation/>
27. <http://www.hchc.edu/studentlife/vocation/about/>
28. For more information, visit: <http://www.crossroadinstitute.org/>
29. For more information, visit: <http://orthodoxcamps.org/>
30. Fr. Alexander Rentel, “Divine Worship in Orthodox Tradition.”

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preparation of this intense and enriching experience.²⁸
Turning our attention to camping programs, we
see that in addition to active liturgical participation,
the camp experience includes consistent fellowship and
study opportunities which support the Christian life.
Camping programs are an amazing opportunity for both
the campers and staff. Many priests in the Antiochian
Archdiocese have had experience working in various
camps across the Archdiocese. This is also true of other
jurisdictions. Thankfully, there are currently attempts
being made to create more opportunities for camp di-
rectors from around the country and in all jurisdictions
to work together.²⁹
While all of these programs are important, even vi-
tal, they lose their effectiveness if the momentum gained
through them is not continued and nurtured once the
youth return home, or the program comes to an end.
The onus to meet the needs of the young is then placed
back on the clergy and youth workers to continue this
work. When we were discussing this project, a friend re-
plied to the idea that youth are often bored during wor-
ship with the claim that “boredom is a personal prob-
lem.” Yes, it is, in fact, a personal problem, but how can
we expect youth not to be bored when we fail to teach
them what the church is, what we are doing, how to be
in church, how to worship and how to participate? How
can their parents be expected to teach these things when
they have not themselves been taught? The responsibility
to solve the problem of boredom is on those entrusted
to teach. If we want engaged parishioners, we need to
engage them. If we want liturgical participants, we need
to participate in their lives in a manner that invites them
to worship God. Boredom might be a personal problem,
but it is not our youth’s problem as much as it is ours.
Through our educational efforts, as mentioned above,
we can begin to shift the culture in our parishes away
from the status quo and towards an understanding of
Liturgical Discipleship. This shift is difficult to execute
and it may take many years before the effects are seen,
but it is possibly, and arguably, necessary. For this shift to
take place, we must be deliberate in our choice of words
and our plan. It needs to be thought through in the same
way a company may construct a business plan or model.
There need to be set goals and some gauge by which we
can measure success. This plan needs to be systematic in
its scope and strategic in its implementation.
Conclusion
“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His
mercy endureth forever”: we begin with the recognition

that God is good, merciful and that this mercy endures.
There is great hope in that recognition. We then renew
our emphasis on presence and participation. This partic-
ipation does not mean that everyone has a job. Not ev-
eryone has something to do liturgically, and that is fine.
Sometimes we participate by not being distracted, but
not being judgmental when there is a crying baby run-
ning up and down the aisles, or when the choir messes
up. Our participation is our action of offering.³⁰ What
are we offering? First and foremost, we offer ourselves. If
we are married, we then offer our spouse. If we are par-
ents, we offer our children. If we are godparents, we offer
our godchildren ... and the list could go on.
Parental involvement is *vital* to the success of any
youth ministry; the successful engagement of parents
begins when they are youth themselves. An understand-
ing of Liturgical Discipleship formed in childhood will
continue into adulthood and be passed down through
the generations. Until our current youth become the
parents of our youth, attention needs to be given to the
parents through educational opportunities designed for
them. These opportunities should be focused on the
their Liturgical Discipleship as a beginning to making
their children disciples.
There are those who may say that education is not
enough, and they may be correct. We have to deal with
Christ’s command to the disciples to baptize and to
teach. We are bound by it. We cannot answer this dual
command by responding only to one part. Our teach-
ing needs to be rooted in baptism and chrismation, so
that our youth may begin to express their Liturgical Dis-
cipleship through participation in the Eucharist – their
commitment to receive the Body of Christ. In turn,
we must provide chances for them to offer themselves
sacrificially in love, and we must model this offering.
Teaching our youth about sacrificial offering is the only
chance at counteracting the narcissism that plagues our
society. Helping them to know God by knowing each
other will help them learn how to interact with people
and counteract their boredom and loneliness. It will also
help with their inability to talk to others. To that end, we
must ensure our youth have a safe environment in which
they can encounter Christ on a regular basis. We need
to ensure that there is a place for them where it is OK
to speak about God, learn about God and, ultimately,
encounter God.

Gregory Abdalah, M.Div., Youth Director
St. George Church, Phoenix, Arizona

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

HENRE, Deacon Patrick, to the holy priesthood by
Bishop BASIL on September 13th, 2015, at the Church
of St. Basil the Great, Kansas City, Kansas. He is as-
signed as proistamenos, effective October 1, 2015,
at the Church of St. John the Theologian, Rapid City,
South Dakota.
PHILLIPS, Schema-monk Theodore, to the diaconate
by Bishop JOHN on September 27, 2015, at St. Mary’s
Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hiero-deacon
Theodore serves at the Monastery of Our Lady and St.
Laurence, Canon City, Colorado.
TALIAFERRO, Kenneth, to the diaconate by Bishop
JOHN on September 13, 2015, at St. Peter Church,
Fort Worth, Texas. He is assigned to that parish.

ELEVATED

MONTO, Priest John, to the dignity of Archpriest by
Bishop THOMAS at Holy Cross Church in Linthicum,
Maryland. He is attached to that parish.
PALMER, Deacon George, to the dignity of Proto-dea-
con by Bishop JOHN on September 13, 2015, at St.
Peter Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

ASSIGNED

FENTON, Archpriest John, effective October 1, 2015,
to St. Michael Church, Whittier, California.
THOMPSON, Priest Nathan, effective August 1, to Ss.
Peter and Paul, Ben Lomond, California.

RELEASED

CREMEENS, Priest Timothy, to the Orthodox Church
in America.

DEPOSED

McFEETERS, Justin, effective October 23, 2015.

RETIRED

BECK, Archpriest Andrew, effective August 1, 2015.

REPOSED

RIVES, Archdeacon Basil, 94, of Holy Trinity, Santa Fe,
New Mexico. The eldest clergyman of the Diocese of
Wichita and Mid-America fell asleep in Christ. May he
be granted Paradise! Archdeacon Basil was preceded
in death by his wife, Shamassy Mary Anne, and is sur-
vived by four sons and many grandchildren and great-
grandchildren.



Children’s Relief Fund

www.childrenreliefund.org
Email: childrensreliefund@gmail.com

*“In as much as you did it to one of the least of these
my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)*

November 1, 2015

Dearly Beloved,

On behalf of all the sponsored children of the Children’s Relief Fund, past and
present, I greet you once again, and pray that our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
continue to sustain you and your loved ones in His everlasting love and mercy.
I appeal to you to support the Children’s Relief Fund this Christmas. The purpose
of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church of North America
is to provide partial education scholarship funds for needy children in Lebanon and
Palestine. Since its inception in 1983, your generosity has provided partial educational
scholarships to several thousand needy elementary and high school children. These
children remain thankful that someone out there cares for their welfare. In 2014, you
supported 390 students (including 18 children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and 76
in Palestine).
As you prepare your year-end charitable gifts and we approach the blessed
Nativity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, please consider making a donation to
the Children’s Relief Fund.
The need is more challenging than ever, as more and more children need financial
assistance. We have some 96 applications of children waiting to be sponsored (24
Syrian refugees; 25 Palestinians and 47 Lebanese).
For those of you who are already sponsoring a child, we offer our most profound
thanks and gratitude. New sponsors are encouraged to open their hearts and join this
humanitarian effort to lift the burden from these children. Please sponsor an individual
needy child at a minimum of \$400 (\$1.10 a day), or simply make a donation to the
general fund.
In anticipation of your kind and generous support, we thank you, and pray that
you enjoy the holy festival with health and happiness. Your generous gift, in this
season of gifts, will help educate a needy child.

As always, I remain –
Yours in Christ,
Fr. George M. Rados
National Director
Phone: (301) 765-3400 / Fax: (301) 765-9591

CHILDREN’S RELIEF FUND ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES



Sponsor a child now

- Take the first step today! Fill out the form below and mail it in.
- You can send your contribution through Pay-Pal. Please check the “donate” of our website.
- We’ll send you the photo and personal story of one child on our waiting list.
- The minimum cost is \$400 a year

ENCLOSED

☐ is my charitable gift of \$ _____ to sponsor a child (\$400.00/year).

☐ is a donation of \$ _____. We cannot sponsor a child at this time,
but would like to contribute to the General Fund.

Please provide the following: *(Your information will remain private.)*

Donor(s) _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____
Zip _____
E-mail _____

I prefer to sponsor a: Boy _____ Girl _____ No Preference _____
From Lebanon _____ From Palestine _____ No Preference _____

All contributions are tax deductible.

Please detach and return with your donation to:

Children’s Relief Fund
c/o The Very Rev. George M. Rados, P.O. Box 60692, Potomac, MD 20859
Thank you for caring about children.

Youth Music Ministry

A PROGRAM SPONSORED BY THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX DEPARTMENT OF SACRED MUSIC

Chris Farha

In the summer of 2012, the Department of Sacred Music implemented a new, successful program that generated great excitement: the Youth Music Ministry (YMM). For four years now, this program has run parallel to the adult track of the Sacred Music Institute and in conjunction with it. YMM gives its participants, ranging in age from 14 to 18, the opportunity to study choral music, Byzantine chant, proper vocal production and technique. They learn challenging new music, perform with their peers, and participate in every Divine Service. They chant and sing, listen attentively to the speakers and classroom teachers, asking pertinent and poignant questions. They come to understand their role in Sacred Music and their contribution to the music of the Church, a ministry that will be with them throughout their lives.

This program brings together youth of like mind and spirit with a love for music and a desire to serve their Church, allowing them to work together for a common goal – to love God and serve with understanding. We have witnessed them making connections and lasting friendships that keep them grounded and linked to the Church during the most challenging years of their young lives. Truly, this is a program with a proven track record of success. For example:

- Total YMM attendance in four years is 91 Teens, with 32 attending two or more years.
- Five of the teens attending the first YMM have been back each year since, either as a YMM participant or

an adult attendee.

- Four of the YMM participants have directed their church choirs at a Sunday Liturgy.
- One has been hired as a part-time director in her church.
- Several chant Vespers every Saturday night and several have become the lead chanter at their churches.

Before attending a Sacred Music Institute, many lacked the confidence to chant in their home parish. Chanting at camp was comfortable for them, among their peers, but chanting in their home parishes was intimidating. Through participation in YMM, they began to understand more clearly the roles of singers, chanters and directors as ministers and gifts from God.

In order to be accepted into the YMM Program, each teen must complete an application, write an essay and request a letter of recommendation from his or her priest. The most powerful recommendation this year came from a priest who said that, after attending for two years, a teen from his parish had “improved tremendously, acquiring the knowledge he needed to help in the services, and he has applied it. He is motivated to search, learn and find the resources to improve and prepare each week. “

There is nothing more beautiful than to get a glimpse into the intellect, the pure heart and the unclouded mind of solid Orthodox Christian teenagers. Reading quotes from the YMM applications will, undoubtedly, fill you with hope and inspiration.

“Widely considered a universal language, music can be traced back to the foundations of civilization.

Today it continues as a powerful force and exists at the heart of the Orthodox tradition. I have been blessed with the opportunity to attend the Sacred Music Institute for the past four years, and because of the youth program I have become more involved in the music in the church – chanting, singing and learning to direct the choir. Furthermore, I have made some of the best friends and memories of my lifetime.”

“Music is the harmony of radiant voices which mix to make one beautiful sound. Church music emphasizes music through prayer, and the words we sing express our desire to live in accordance with God. Music is my one true passion in life, and there is no better way to combine passion in life with my goal in life: to be united to Christ. The Sacred Music Institute will give me the opportunity to learn the true meaning of the hymns we sing and share a common aspiration with complete strangers.”

“The beauty and purity of Orthodox music surpasses anything I have ever experienced. I want to grow and develop my limited skill so that I may be able to serve God and my parish to the best of my ability. I will do everything within my power to become a better singer and chanter and the SMI program will offer me a great opportunity to grow in my ability as a chanter.”

“Perhaps the first sounds I ever heard were the sounds of music in the church. My mother went to every church service when she was pregnant with me. I have always had the church in my life. As I have grown older, I have realized the range and depth of music in the annual cycle of the Church. I attended a West Coast Sacred Music Institute, where someone broke the words down and explained the meaning of the prayers. It was like falling in love all over again. Everything was made new and exciting and I couldn’t wait for Holy Week to come again so that I could experience it with new meaning. “

“Last year, I found that the YMM empowered me to participate in my faith more than I normally did before. It was a powerful learning experience for me, both in singing and in spirituality, and helped to set me on the road to serving our Holy Father better. I know that this year will be no different, and it will greatly aid me on my spiritual journey to find peace in God’s grace.”

“Like most teenagers, I usually like to put on music in the car while driving and ‘jam out.’ However, unlike most teenagers, the music I put on often isn’t the typical pop and rap music that is so popular today.

Rather, I frequently find myself singing along to fifth-century Byzantine hymns sung by the Mount Lebanon Choir or Boston Byzantine Choir. Furthermore, I sometimes find myself putting off doing homework so I can look over new music for that night’s service. I guess you could say that church music plays a large role in my life.”

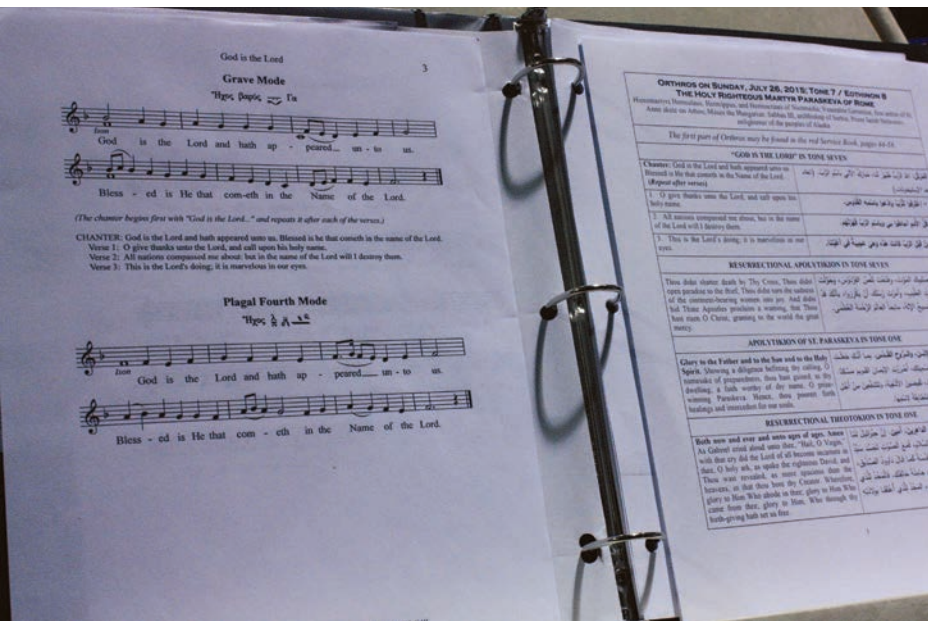
“Not only has SMI helped me improve my chanting, but it has also given me unforgettable memories and introduced me to amazing new friends and people who share a love for our Church’s music. Last year, we requested a priest to come and serve Compline. After the service, we would all stay up until the moment curfew hit to sing our favorite hymns. I had never felt so at peace and in such a prayerful mood.”

“Music is the harmony of radiant voices which mix to make one beautiful sound.”

“I LOVE the music of the Orthodox church. Some of my earliest memories in church were listening to the choir and chanters and getting to stand and sing with my dad in the choir. As a 16-year-old, I always go to sleep listening to Orthodox music.”

It was only with the support of hierarchs and the Order of St. Ignatius that the vision of dedicated Archdiocesan musicians could take shape and become a reality. We thank God for everyone who had the foresight to break untrodden ground and invest in our young musicians, to plant seeds that will bear a lifetime of fruit. We thank each diocese for seeking out and funding travel expenses, some with line-item budgeting, others with successful fundraising. As you read this and wonder what you might do to help, consider the following: Please take note of the youth of your parish; encourage those who have a gift for music to apply to attend Youth Music Ministry; nurture them, love them, help them stay rooted; pray with them and pray for them, that the hymns of the Church live and flourish in their hearts; help guide them on the same path that we all began at our baptism with the first prayer: “Make *him* to rejoice in the works of *his* hands, and in all *his* generation; that *he* may render praise unto Thee, may *sing, worship and glorify* Thy Great and exalted name always, all the days of *his* life....”

Chris Farha, Youth Music Ministry Administrator
chrisfarha@cox.net



The Gift of Life



UTSW Living Donor Website
http://www.utsouthwestern.edu/patientcare/medicalservices/transplants/livingdonor-kidney.html
Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN)
http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/

This is a very difficult letter for me to write, but otherwise so many members of our Orthodox family would have no knowledge of my mother’s situation, and would have no opportunity to help. This is the situation of others, too, in our communities. My mother, Khouria Elizabeth Mahfood Bethoney, is the wife of the late Archpriest Robert (Bob) James Bethoney, who passed away in June, 2014. My mother needs a kidney transplant.

Mom is on kidney dialysis as she waits for a donor, and dialysis is both physically and emotionally draining. Even on dialysis, she suffers the adverse effects of chronic kidney disease to her heart, her blood vessels and her bones. It is heartbreaking.

There are many reasons that my Mom needs a living kidney donor, but the main ones are these: the waiting list for a kidney from a deceased donor averages more than five years, but Mom’s transplant team says her surgery must be done much, much sooner because of the state of her health, and kidneys from living donors typically last twice as long as do kidneys from deceased persons. Mom’s transplant team says she is not a candidate for a deceased donor kidney.

I did not know how many people needed organ transplants until my mother went into kidney failure. Here are the current sad facts from the National Kidney Foundation:

- A total of 123,193 people are waiting for organ transplants, and 22 of those waiting die each day.
- A large majority – 101,662 people – of those waiting

for an organ transplant need a kidney. More than half of those who die each day needed a kidney.

- In 2014, 4,270 patients died waiting for a kidney and 3,617 became too sick to stay on the transplant list.

Christ calls us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Sometimes we care for each other in little ways, and sometimes we care for each other in very big ways. Many people are not even aware that they can give this truly incredible gift of life. Here is some basic information about kidney donation:

- We are born with an extra kidney. We only need one kidney to live a full, healthy, long life.
- The kidney is the only living organ that can be fully transplanted.
- The majority of the donor surgery is done laparoscopically, with tiny incisions.
- The recuperation period is approximately four weeks; however, for those with a desk job it could be as soon as two weeks and possibly six weeks for those whose job

- involves heavy lifting.
- Surgeries are done at top-tier hospitals that employ many of the country’s best surgeons.
 - The medical expenses are paid by the patient’s (in this case, my mother’s) insurance benefits. Any other possible expenses (such as food, hotel, plane, and so forth), can be fully reimbursed by the recipient.
 - Most donors say if they had another extra kidney they would donate again in a heartbeat. They feel that it is one of the best experiences of their life.
 - Many people can donate, providing that they do not have cardiac problems, uncontrolled high blood pressure or certain other medical conditions.

I ask for your help on behalf of my Mom, who devotes every day of her life to making a difference in the lives of others. Would you please consider giving this gift of life for the sake of another? Would you be willing to learn more about being a kidney donor? Maybe *you* will be the match for Mom! The willing giving of oneself for God or neighbor is the ultimate expression of love. In the Gospel of St. John (15:13), Jesus tells us, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” This self-sacrificing Christian love for one’s neighbor should be the motivation for such a decision, which emulates the sacrifice of Christ Himself.

Please help us by considering a kidney donation on behalf of my Mom. If you would like to learn more about living kidney donation, please call or e-mail me. I will send you information to help you understand more about living-donor kidney donations and make a well-informed decision. You could also call my mother’s transplant coordinator, Helen LieVan, at UT Southwestern in Dallas (214-645-1919) for a confidential conversation and answers to your questions.

Please forward this letter to others – including family, friends, work and school associates – you think might be able to help. Your efforts would be tremendously appreciated.

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

We hope you will consider being tested to be a donor. The situation is urgent: Mom’s transplant team has told us that there is not much time before she will be too weak to undergo transplant surgery. Please pray for my Mom and all of those needing organ transplants.

May God bless each of you, your family, and your loved ones with long life and good health.

Alexis Bethoney Gerena
LexiB2003@aol.com • 915-487-7958

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ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

2015 Judges Choice, Salena Ibrahim

Diocese of the Midwest and Toledo

Standing before the magnificent Iconostas during Divine Liturgy a few Sundays ago, I was suddenly overcome with a sense of wonder and deep gratitude. Looking around, I realized that the Liturgy was unlike any other I had experienced. As always, the traditional hymns were chanted, the Epistle and Gospel were read, the Word of God was preached, and the church community lifted up their hearts and souls in a united prayer. Yet something was dramatically different. For the first time, we were celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the gymnasium of our recently purchased church building. Yes, you heard me correctly. We were not in the church sanctuary, but in a gymnasium. I once again raised my eyes towards the Holy Altar, and I watched as the parish priest closed his eyes and extended his arms heavenward, giving up his entire self to God and thus uniting the righteous prayers of the people and offering them up to “God the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him...” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Never before had I felt such thankfulness for a church in which to worship, a community with which to celebrate and learn, and the clergy who personify the Christian mission as established by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew: “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28).

I am grateful to our church leaders who, like St. Raphael of Brooklyn, recognized and embraced the need for a new mission church for the Antiochian Orthodox Christians; in this instance, it was in my hometown, over twelve years ago. Although the obstacles to starting a new parish were great, the community truly took to heart the words in the book of Deuteronomy: “Be valiant and strong ... for the Lord, Your God, He is the one who goes before you and with you and among you” (31:6).

As I became more familiar with the incredible life of St. Raphael through reading the book *Our Father Among*

the Saints, Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, I realized the situations of his missionary work, with all of their tribulations, greatly resembled the hardships and perseverance of my church community when they began the process of establishing a new parish. Just as St. Raphael “set as [his] first task the organization of a permanent church for the faithful” and began to gather “all that he would need to establish a church temple – holy vessels, icons, [and] vestments,” the priest assigned to our new mission worked tirelessly to erect a church home for God’s children (*Our Father Among the Saints, Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn: Good Shepherd of the Lost Sheep in America*, pages 25–26). Although the shepherd of our new parish was denied his requests to use the churches in the area temporarily to celebrate the divine services, the community took heed to the words of Scripture: “Do not let ... faithfulness forsake you Trust in God with all your heart” (Proverbs 3:3,5). In the same manner as St. Raphael, our pastor resorted to prayer and “committed himself and his flock to the care of the Mother of God” (*Our Father Among the Saints*, page 61). We learn in the same book that the Lord fulfilled the promise never to abandon His people. He provided for the needs of St. Raphael by raising up “an earthly angel” who offered financial assistance for the Saint to finish his theological studies at the school in Halki, near Constantinople (*Our Father Among the Saints*, page 8). In the same manner, God raised up “an earthly angel” for our community, in the person of a priest at a nearby church, who allowed the newly established parish to use their church building for divine services for as long as was needed.

Since then, through the grace of God and the dedication of our community, my parish has not only flourished, but has also relocated twice because our numbers have increased, and we are currently renovating to beautify and expand the church sanctuary. It is for these reasons that the Liturgy I attended in the gymnasium

a few weeks ago ignited a flame of gratitude within my heart. Who could have ever believed our parish, our home, could have grown so much in such a short period of time?

Needless to say, it is because of my church community that I not only have been strengthened in a world of increasing secular pressures, but I have also finally understood the irreplaceable influence of St. Raphael, a man who, just as the book shows, “realized [that] the future of the Orthodox Church in the New World did not so much depend upon continued immigration as it did upon instructing the youth of the Church in the faith” (*Our Father Among the Saints*, page 57). It is through the teachings of the various ministries within the Orthodox churches that we, the youth, are prepared to be future leaders, living our faith with sincerity of heart. As Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory once stated, “The faithful youth are the heartbeat of the Church.” It is because of the strength of the visionary St. Raphael in establishing mission churches in the New World, and the great emphasis he put on educating the youth in the Orthodox faith, that the place I call home, my parish, has influenced me to “lay up ... treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20). How else can I be strengthened, than through receiving

the Body and Blood of Christ? Truly, it is through this sacrament and the example of my church community that I can imitate Christ in my every action, just as St. Paul stated in his Epistle to the Corinthians, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (11:1). St. Raphael is not only an inspiration to every mission church, but also to every young person confronted with the difficulty of living the faith in the current culture. To me, emulating the work of St. Raphael and embracing my faith must begin with understanding the first lesson in holiness that St. Raphael can teach, as Fr. John W. Fenton writes: “Serving others means that we must be willing to sacrifice our own ambitions – what we want and where we want to be” (“Panegyric for St. Raphael,” *The WORD*,

April 2015). The lessons in faith that I have learned from our parish priests as well as from our parishioners have formed the very foundation of all I aspire to achieve in my lifetime. It is the basis for my desire to “entice, cajole, lead and encourage as many as... [I] can to realize... [the] goal...to attain the kingdom of heaven” (“Panegyric for St. Raphael”). This, too, is a lesson the life of St. Raphael has taught me.

The church building we are renovating is not just a block of cement. It will be a home for us, the people of God. These are the very people who, since I was a young girl, have influenced me to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, [and] in everything give thanks...” (Thessalonians 5:16–18). It is because of their example and that of St. Raphael that I can live out the statement of Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words.”

As I stood in line for Communion that Sunday a few weeks ago, I saw before me the radiance of God and

his wonders in the icons’ portrayal of the saints. The lives of these holy men and women have lead believers in pursuit of a heavenly goal, just as St. Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Hebrews: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is

set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...” (12:1–2). I finally understood that God gave me something great that began with the work of St. Raphael. Before my very eyes was the most precious gift, that could not be compared with either the vastness of the sky or the depth of the ocean. I celebrated that treasure with the people I love and those who love me. This community and the generations to come – the very Body of Christ – is the true legacy of St. Raphael.



Salena is from St. Mary Church of Palos Heights, Illinois.

College Admission Essay

Elan Neagle from Dallas, Texas wrote this letter as part of her college application. Metropolitan JOSEPH wanted to share it to show what kind of impact the youth programs have on our young people.

Becoming President of my church youth group, Society of Orthodox Youth Organization (Teen SOYO), molded me into the leader I am today. A few years ago, our SOYO group was fairly small and did not participate in many activities. My mother told me stories about how her teen SOYO group had the time of their lives and have reunions to this day. After learning this, I knew something needed to change within our teen group. Our church went through a major transition and decided to move to a much larger church and facility. During this big move, we lost our teen youth director to another city and parish. Because of this change, I took initiative in attempting to create a stronger, more exciting Teen SOYO.

I began creating a list of activities, community service projects, and social gatherings that I could implement. It was my vision that we would all commit to serving the public, our parish, and each other. As our church changed and I became aware of the situation, I took action and was elected president of this youth group. Since then, I have worked diligently in forming a united group committed to bonding together while doing good for our church and the community.

As a result of my new vision, our attendance numbers are up, the activities have increased, and the friendships have grown stronger. This past summer, we hosted the second-annual Vacation Bible School. Our Teen SOYO group organized and implemented the entire event. Everything from registration to transportation was my responsibility. We are committed to helping each other grow in our faith and in our community. Having a vision and seeing it develop into a reality will help me in my future endeavors.

This past July, I attended our National Archdiocese Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. This opportunity allowed me to attend meetings in which the Patriarch and Metropolitan spoke about real tragedies involving the kidnapping of two Bishops, the ongoing war with ISIS, and the poor conditions of people living in the Middle East. Since the conference, I have become aware of the serious global situations and the importance of our Orthodox community. By recreating our SOYO group, I have matured not only in experience, but also in consciousness of critical situations, around the world.

Although there are many great aspects to attending a private school for fourteen years, it instills a security within you that is your responsibility to break out of. Recently, this situation has allowed me to think outside of the box and feel more confident about branching out and expanding my friendships and interests. I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with new and different people, who I have spent many years with but have not taken the initiative to know on a social level. All of my life I have been sheltered and secluded in a safe environment without much change. I believe that having my success in improving Teen SOYO readied me to experience new adventures while taking on stronger leadership roles.

Having a leadership role helped me mature and obtain new skills that have formed me into the studious leader I am today. As I grow and become faced with future situations, I know I will have the confidence to express my opinion and attempt to make necessary changes. I know the world is compiled of many beliefs and personalities. However, I have the enthusiasm to help make positive changes in our environment and community to better my life and the lives of others.

BOOK NOTICE

Broken Promises and White House Meetings (Antakya Press, Englewood, New Jersey 2015), is a book co-authored by Archbishop PHILIP Saliba and Dr. Najib E. Saliba. The book has been in the making for a few years and has just been released by the printer in July, 2015. It is composed of two parts.

Part I, “Broken Promises” by Dr. Najib E. Saliba, discusses American Presidents’ experiences in peacemaking between the Arab states (especially the Palestinians) and the State of Israel from the Eisenhower administration through Barack Obama’s first presidency, with special focus on the period from The Madrid Peace Conference (1991) onward.

Part II, “White House Meetings,” by Archbishop PHILIP, deals with his experience in White House meetings with several American Presidents, trying to impress upon them the need for peace in the Middle East not only for the Arabs’ sake but also for the Israelis’ and American interests in the Middle East as well. The book as a whole is a critique of America’s Middle East foreign policy.

The two parts are very complementary with full documentation, references, and bibliography for Part I. The book is distributed by the Antiochian Village Heritage and Learning Center bookstore. Please write to:

Antiochian Village Heritage and Learning Center
140 Church Camp Trail, Bolivar, PA 15923
Or

Bookstore Requests:
Email: bookstore2@antiochianvillage.org
Online Bookstore: <http://store.antiochianvillage.org/>

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Three Hierarchs, Wenatchee, Celebrates Acquisition of New Property

A gorgeous, sunlit Sunday afternoon in October was the setting for a truly momentous occasion in the life of our small, but growing, mission of Three Hierarchs in Wenatchee, Washington. On that day, after a glorious Divine Liturgy, our community travelled the short distance to our newly acquired property for a service of blessing and thanksgiving.

The service of blessing was conducted in front of a wooden cross, 16 feet high, erected the day before. It was the brainchild of several members of our community, who also hand-cut and built the cross. The wood itself came from a tree on the property of another church member. The (now) *three*-bar cross, which stands just across the street from the Wenatchee Cemetery, has become a point of interest and inspiration for many in our city.

The acquisition of 1.7 acres is something akin to miraculous, considering our congregation’s humble size and resources. In addition, the door to purchasing this property seemed to close on several occasions, but God kept opening it again.

A good portion of the funds for the downpayment came from offerings received over a period of four years (2006–2010) when I, and sometimes other priests, came monthly to serve and grow the mission. With each visit, our small group put their “two mites” into a treasury, funds from which would eventually go toward the site of Three Hierarchs.

Our people are some of the most generous, giving, and hospital peo-

ple I have ever known. Their love for God takes precedence over self-interest. There are no individual agendas, only a singular desire to glorify the Holy Trinity and His Holy Orthodox Church, qualities inherited from the example of our patrons, the Three Hierarchs: Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom.

Our initial group of about 12 faithful Orthodox Christians has grown into a congregation of 43, with another 24 preparing for entrance into the Holy Church. All of this has happened in a cloistered little valley, previously oblivious to the existence of the Orthodox Church, and instinctively averse to “new” or different things.

The Wenatchee Valley is a beautiful recreational paradise located at the confluence of the Wenatchee and Columbia rivers, nestled within the foothills of the Cascade and Wenatchee mountain ranges in north-central Washington. It is best known as the “apple capital of the world,” but is famous for its cherry

and other fruit-production as well. With 300 days of sunshine each year, the valley’s plentiful recreational opportunities include snow-skiing, boating and water-skiing, hiking, camping, fishing and hunting, rock climbing, and biking. Confluence Health, with its hospital and clinic, boasts over 350 physicians and mid-level practitioners, providing top-notch medical care to all of the surrounding area.

For the last four years, Three Hierarchs Mission has been worshipping in a storefront property in the midst of downtown Wenatchee. Upon paying off the land loan, our hope is to start by building a fellowship hall in stages, with offices, classrooms, kitchen, and so forth. This structure, we hope, can double as worship space until such time that we can build a church temple in the traditional Orthodox architectural style. With God’s help and many prayers, all will be accomplished to His glory!



Three Hierarchs Mission in Wenatchee, Washington, holds service of thanksgiving and blessing for new property.

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