METROPOLITAN JOSEPH & ARCHDIOCESAN DELEGATION WITH PATRIARCH KIRILL
Brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy and Monastics, Esteemed Trustees and Officers of our Organizations, Honored Delegates, Beloved in Christ:

Christ is in our midst!

I begin my address with the High Priestly Prayer of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, spoken after He had shared His Immaculate Body and Precious Blood with His Holy Disciples and Apostles and before offering that very Body and Blood upon the wood of the life-giving Cross:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me (John 17:20–23).

Our Lord, in this most dramatic moment in the history of our salvation, offered this prayer, not just on behalf of those who were with Him, but for all of us who now believe in Him because of their word. The Savior's foremost concern for His disciples was their unity, and His heartfelt and fervent prayer was for their unity to be ever perfected – made perfect with love that should unite us to Him and to one another as He and the Father are...
united to one another.

When I received the archpastoral staff on the sixth of December in 2014, the day of my enthronement, five years ago, I was entrusted with safeguarding this sacred unity in our God-protected diocese. I offered an oath to our Lord and to Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny), the Right Reverend Bishop, in 1957, to the Right Reverend Bishop NICHOLAS, in 1967, to the Right Reverend Bishop ANTHONY, in 1972, to the Right Reverend Bishop ALEXANDER, in 1982, to the Right Reverend Bishop BASIL, in 1992, and to the Most Reverend Metropolitan JOSEPH, in 2002. These obligations united me with my predecessors. In turn, I was asked to join my efforts to the clergy, the lay leaders of this Archdiocese that we will offer our Lord and the faithful every ounce of our sweat and blood, and our very lives, to cooperate with the grace of God in the sacred work of perfecting our unity. We are and will remain ONE.

How can we practically describe this unity, and how can we work continually to perfect it? This year, during this convention, we are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Antiochian Village. Forty years ago, my predecessor of thrice-blessed memory, His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP, had a vision for his flock of a place of spiritual refuge from the cares and distractions of the world, a place for young and old to find refreshment and hear the voice of God. Forty years ago, he saw a piece of land in the hills of western Pennsylvania that would become our “Holy Mountain” – the Antiochian Village.

When we think of our unity, I would like us to think of the young people currently enjoying a session of camp at the Village. We can envision a cabin of campers with their counselor, striving to be perfected in unity. This morning, they woke up early to clean their cabin together – making their beds, sweeping their floor, cleaning their bathroom, and organizing their belongings. This simple act of common asceticism on behalf of one another begins a day where they learn the value of loving God with all their minds, hearts, souls, and strength, and their neighbors as themselves.

They continued their day by chanting Orthros together, joining their voices to the choir of the heavenly hosts. They stood in prayer with no pews. They were fed with the Word of God in the readings of the Scriptures and the homilies of dedicated clergy. They broke bread together in the dining hall, where they take turns serving one another as “waiters” and shout with joy in beautiful Christian fellowship. They were offered lessons in Christian education for two hours by specially trained counselors throughout their morning. They will continue their day in spirited but friendly competition on the playing fields, and they will worship together by chanting the Vespers service in the early evening. They will end their evening with cabin times, discussing the intersection of their faith and their lives, and after ending the day with evening prayers together as a cabin.

For a generation raised on computer tablets and television, this kind of camp program may sound boring or even distasteful. I promised five years ago that what I have learned through the travels of my first five years is that this Archdiocese is truly ONE. There are those who would like to divide us or introduce confusion or chaos into the life of our Archdiocese. We must always be on guard against this divisive work of the enemy of our salvation and his agents. We must be that image of another camp at the Village. We can envision a cabin of campers and counselors, striving to be perfected in unity. This morning, they woke up early to clean their cabin together – making their beds, sweeping their floor, cleaning their bathroom, and organizing their belongings. This simple act of common asceticism on behalf of one another begins a day where they learn the value of loving God with all their minds, hearts, souls, and strength, and their neighbors as themselves.
that they need in order to be happy, and thus they

enbrace the Christian life in all its simplicity and au-

ternity, humility and love, service and sacrifice. And

they find joy, beloved in Christ. True joy.

This joy has inspired the youth of our Archdi-

cocese for forty years. This joy has inspired countless

vocations in the ministries of our Archdiocese. How

many of you would not be here today as

members of the camp? How many of you would not be

here today as priests and deacons – even bish-

ophs? How many of you would not be here today as
delegates? As lay leaders? As youth workers? How

many of you owe your marriages to camp crushes

that blossomed into deep and abiding love? Today,

we are blessed to see a generation of children from

camp marriages enjoying the camp experience as

their parents did before them, passing on a sacred

legacy. We also see that sacred legacy being passed
down and experienced throughout all the camps

that we have in our Archdiocese.

Today, I ask you to focus on those lessons that

the campers in that cabin I described are current-

ly learning. Perfecting our unity comes with hard

work and asceticism – loving and forgiving, serving

and sacrificing, praying and worshipping. When we

do these things, we take up our crosses and follow

Christ. We embrace the true joy the Lord prayed for

on our behalf: “that they may have My joy fulfilled

in themselves.”

I want to take a moment to offer gratitude to

His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of Thrice-

Blessed Memory for fulfilling his vision, for

creating the Antiochian Village. I also would like to

honor the memory of the first camp director, Fr.

John Namiot of Thrice-Blessed Memory. When vis-

iting the camp, we may forget the austere place that

was here for forty years. This joy has inspired countless

leaders? As youth workers? How
does this work. Our Lord did not tell us

to stay together,

and for their meetings, they come home to the Village.

Let me say unequivocally, that what I have learned

through the travels of my first five years is that this

Archdiocese is truly ONE.

Archdiocese is truly ONE.
We have all witnessed the impossibility of worshipping in the St. Peter & Paul chapel during our gatherings. We choose to have meetings at the Village instead of hotels for the spiritual environment, but ironically, we worship in a temporary space that is reminiscent of a hotel ballroom – right down to the portable iconostasis. We choose to have meetings at the Village: our home, awaiting alongside St. Raphael, Metropolitan PHILIP, and Bishop ANTOUN, the Second Consecration of Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. If you have not availed yourself of the many blessings of the Antiochian Village, I urge you to do so. There are so many truly excellent offerings that happen there every year. I also urge all of you to “think big” about the many beautiful things that can be added to what the Antiochian Village offers. Let us join together to continue making the Antiochian Village our home, our heart, and our Holy Mountain.

Recently, I went on a pilgrimage to Russia with members of our Board of Trustees and others — my third visit to the country — and before I close my remarks, I want to share a few thoughts from the trip. My first visit was with Patriarch IGNATIUS IV of Thrice-Blessed Memory in 1981. At the time, the country was still under the oppression of an atheistic regime. In my recent visit, I saw a Church that has been resurrected. I saw monasteries full of monks and nuns, seminaries full of future clergy, and newly rebuilt cathedrals full of believers.

Perhaps most moving of all, I saw the pilgrims who wait three to four hours on a workday to spend thirty seconds in front of the tomb of St. Matrona of Moscow — a blind, paralyzed woman who spent thirty seconds in front of the tomb of St. Matrona of Moscow, which she all spoke was taken from the inscription over the Arch at the Village: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I was moved by the fact that this theme in our contemporary context would be discussed in a self-focused way — such as Christ helping our young people to get high-paying jobs, attain celebrity, or achieve mental good things. After all, many so-called Christians would preach on that passage in precisely that way. I have been heartened that every speech I heard came from the correct understanding that St. Paul wrote about: we can endure any hardship when Christ strengthens us. That is our Christian hope, and they have renewed my Christian hope in them and our future.

Meet me and our young people, brothers and sisters in Christ, in hope. Join me and our young people, brothers and sisters in Christ, in joy. Join us in working towards expanding every ministry in this Archdiocese and creating new ones to address our needs. Join me in mutually taking up our crosses — with love and forgiveness, prayer and worship, service and self-sacrifice, hope and joy. Join me in the work of perfecting our unity as one Archdiocese.

I ask you to pray for our Holy Archdiocese. Yes, our culture around us is careening into madness. Yes, we have weaknesses. Yes, we have anxieties. Yet, we have hope. We have the hope of St. Matrona of Moscow and all of those Christians who suffered under the Bolshevist yoke that, yes, the Resurrection was just over the horizon. We have the hope of Fr. John Namie and his staff, who lived in those cabins with holes in the floor, that, yes, the Village would transform generations of youth into future clergy and lay-leaders of the Church. We have the hope of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who traveled the expanse of North America with no place to lay his head, that, yes, this Archdiocese would flourish. Brothers and Sisters in Christ: We have hope!

Let me also point out that listening to the orations of our young people over the course of our parish life conferences and this convention should give us great hope for the future. As we know, the convention theme was about which they all spoke was that of the inscription over the Arch at the Village: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I was moved by the fact that this theme in our contemporary context would be discussed in a self-focused way — such as Christ helping our young people to get high-paying jobs, attain celebrity, or achieve mental good things. After all, many so-called Christians would preach on that passage in precisely that way. I have been heartened that every speech I heard came from the correct understanding that St. Paul wrote about: we can endure any hardship when Christ strengthens us. That is our Christian hope, and they have renewed my Christian hope in them and our future.

Join me and our young people, brothers and sisters in Christ, in hope. Join me and our young people, brothers and sisters in Christ, in joy. Join us in working towards expanding every ministry in this Archdiocese and creating new ones to address our needs. Join me in mutually taking up our crosses — with love and forgiveness, prayer and worship, service and self-sacrifice, hope and joy. Join me in the work of perfecting our unity as one Archdiocese.

I ask you to pray for our Holy Archdiocese. Yes, our culture around us is careening into madness. Yes, we have weaknesses. Yes, we have anxieties. Yet, we have hope. We have the hope of St. Matrona of Moscow and all of those Christians who suffered under the Bolshevist yoke that, yes, the Resurrection was just over the horizon. We have the hope of Fr. John Namie and his staff, who lived in those cabins with holes in the floor, that, yes, the Village would transform generations of youth into future clergy and lay-leaders of the Church. We have the hope of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who traveled the expanse of North America with no place to lay his head, that, yes, this Archdiocese would flourish. Brothers and Sisters in Christ: We have hope!

Let me also point out that listening to the orations of our young people over the course of our parl
ith exuberance lingering through the forty days of Pascha, the moment was right for a group of Antiochian believers to embark on a pilgrimage led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH in early spring, from May 13 to 27, 2019. This journey appropriately would take believers to Russia – which is home to the resurrected ancient Russian Orthodox Church.

By invitation of His Holiness Patriarch KIRILL, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, together with His Eminence Metropolitan NIPHON, head of the Antiochian Metochian (representation church) in Moscow, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH accepted this invitation as a wonderful opportunity to reaffirm bonds of friendship and good will with the Antiochian Orthodox Church and Antiochian Christians from America. With His Eminence at the helm, the delegation of 25 consisted of clergy, the V. Rev. Thomas Zain, Rev. Nicholas Belcher and Dcn. John (Rassem) and Mrs. Alexis El Massih. Members of the Board of Trustees, some accompanied by their spouses, included Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Mr. Salim Abboud, Mr. Elias Hebeka, Mr. Khalil Kardous, Dr. and Mrs. George Madanat, Mr. and Mrs. Majed Nesheiwat, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Pagani and Mr. Mansour Rayan.

Additional pilgrims completing the group were Mrs. Dianne Henderson, Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Matta, Mr. and Mrs. Nagib Saliba, Mr. Jamil Samara, with welcome guest Dr. Ghassan Skaf of Beirut and the youngest pilgrims, Miss Simone Zain and Miss Sonia El Massih (age two), proving that it’s never too early or too late to seek and find edification through our Faith!

A full daily schedule and detailed itinerary included visiting and attending the cycle of services in new and restored monasteries, churches, and shrines, visiting museums and palaces, and learning about Russia’s people and history through the churches, their art, personal encounters and history. Each pilgrim experienced personal renewal. While it is difficult to put into words all that was shared and learned, His Eminence, as a true father, and by experience, had anticipated what each pilgrim would come to know. He knew as well the need and importance of this experience for each member of the delegation.

From the imperial capital of St. Petersburg to ancient Novgorod to modern Moscow, the pilgrims were struck by the beauty which constantly surrounded them. In fact, after seeing stunning sacred churches, palaces and art galleries, the pilgrims began to speak of a “beauty fatigue.” This aesthetic overload was quite a contrast to the painful history that was repeated in many places and in many ways. Daily, the guides shared stories of the struggles and deprivation that were endured by the people during the Second World War. Priests and monastics described the persecution of the faithful and destruction of churches. One could not help but be overwhelmed by the suffering that lay under the surface of all the beauty, and the price that was paid by so many. This is key to understanding the Russian soul and Slavic spirituality.

St. John of Kronstadt writes, “Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him, because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the
person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

One cannot help but think that this “image of God” found in His people, understood properly through the Church’s sacred art, stood in stark contrast to the atheism and materialism of the past regime. The past can only “be a chance misfortune” appearing for a short time as an “illness,” in comparison to the “image of God that remains in the person” and the timeless beauty of Orthodoxy. Today, one can taste “image of God that remains in the person” and the incredible beauty of Orthodoxy.

Certainly, it was not the sustaining of beauty alone that brought about the collapse of Communism and the restoration of Orthodoxy, but the fervent prayers of the saints and the witness of countless martyrs. One of the great icons of the pilgrimage was establishing prayerful relationships with these saints and martyrs through venerating their relics and visiting the places where they lived, prayed and died. During the Divine Liturgy at the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra just outside of Moscow, the group was blessed with the relics of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, and St. Sergius of Radonezh, an important fourteenth-century Russian saint known to so many worldwide.

The group witnessed the fulfillment of his prophecies before their very eyes. There could be no doubt that these two giants of the Russian Church offered constant and fervent prayers for the faithful during the dark days of Communism, and that they are still praying for a complete renewal of the Russian Orthodox Church.

A visit to St. Xenia of St. Petersburg (from the Eighteenth Century) at the Smolensky Cemetery offered pilgrims the opportunity to be anointed by oil from her tomb. People still flock daily to seek her heavenly intercessions and she is venerated in many countries. She has become a beloved saint known to be the intercessor to many, particularly those seeking help with employment, marriage, homelessness, fires, missing children and those seeking a spouse.

While in St. Petersburg, the pilgrims enjoyed the hospitality of Metropolitan Varnesouchy during the all-night vigil at St. Nicholas Cathedral, and a delightful lunch the next day after the Divine Liturgy at the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra.

Upon arrival in Moscow, the group prayed, exchanged thoughts, and broke bread with His Eminence Metropolitan Helarion, Chairman of the Department of External Church Affairs. Pilgrims were overjoyed to discover and venerate the relics of St. Tikhon of Moscow, who consecrated St. Raphael of Brooklyn, as well as the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn, New York. It was under his care that St. Raphael began the “Syro-Arab Mission” in 1895. After his tenure in America, he returned to Russia and became the first patriarch after Peter the Great, only to be imprisoned by the last Czar of the Romanovs, and executed.

In the monastery that houses her holy relics, lines wound three and four hours to spend just a brief few moments in her presence. The pilgrims all have the strong, palpable sense of holiness at her relics and understood why pilgrims are drawn to her. Later, while reading more about her, we learned that St. Matrona foretold the following before her death: “After my death few people will come to my grave, only my closest. When they die, my grave will be abandoned, and will be visited only occasionally…. But many years later, people will learn about me and will come in crowds to ask for help in their troubles. They will ask me to pray for them to the Lord, and I will hear and help everybody.”

The indescribable power of her intercessions was felt by all and the pilgrims began to understand why the faithful come from throughout the world to venerate her relics. It was a clear message that the power of the atheistic regime was not conquered through the force of arms, but by the strength of Christ made perfect in weakness – the “weakness” of the blind St. Matrona, the “weakness” of those imprisoned in concentration camps, and the “weakness” of the oppressed believers.

In addition to encountering the living saints of the past, the pilgrims encountered the gracious hospitality of the present leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and our Antiochian representative in Moscow, His Eminence Metropolitan Niphon. His Eminence hosted a grand reception following a majestic Divine Liturgy on the last Sunday of the Civil War. The service was celebrated by over three hundred bishops, priests, and seminarians throughout the country, but they were eventually recognized for their “humility, patience and meekness” and canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

During those dark days, while many of the Russian nobility and intelligentsia had begun to abandon the Faith, and many of the common people had only a weak attachment to the Church, the “weakness” of the Russian Orthodox Church and our Antiochian representative in Moscow, His Eminence Metropolitan Niphon, His Eminence hosted a grand reception following a majestic Divine Liturgy on the last Sunday of the Civil War. The service was celebrated by over three hundred bishops, priests, and seminarians throughout the country, but they were eventually recognized for their “humility, patience and meekness” and canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

The group was honored with a special audience with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and St. Tikhon of Moscow. The gracious hospitality and receptions received at the many monasteries and convents visited are too many to list. Even when we dropped in unannounced, we found that these holy people go out of their way to make you feel welcome and provide true Christian hospitality.

To say that this or any pilgrimage was inspiring would be an understatement. These experiences teach us, inspire us, strengthen us, and also warn us. The Russia of the Tsars, of which we heard, and saw reminders, with its magnificent palaces and refined culture, crumbled at the blink of an eye in 1917. As Orthodox Christians, however, we must remember that Tsar Nicholas and his family were faithful believers and lived very modestly in private life. They maintained a regular prayer life, both individually and as a family, fasting, and celebrating the church feasts. They also purposefully supported the construction, renovation and building of numerous churches and monasteries throughout Russia. They were benevolent and pious monarchs, thus, perhaps in some way, leading to their demise. The entire royal family was brutally massacred in 1918, offering the ultimate sacrifice in this life for their faith and country, but they were eventually recognized for their “humility, patience and meekness” and canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

During those dark days, while many of the Russian nobility and intelligentsia had begun to abandon the Faith, and many of the common people had only a weak attachment to the Church, the “weakness” of the Russian Orthodox Church and our Antiochian representative in Moscow, His Eminence Metropolitan Niphon, His Eminence hosted a grand reception following a majestic Divine Liturgy on the last Sunday of the Civil War. The service was celebrated by over three hundred bishops, priests, and seminarians throughout the country, but they were eventually recognized for their “humility, patience and meekness” and canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.
All great stories of pilgrimages are like *The Canterbury Tales*. Geoffrey Chaucer’s masterpiece from 1392 recounts stories told by 26 characters. These characters have external and internal conflicts that separate them into individuals, who nonetheless seek to embrace again the essence of the Lord as one Body. In the case of the Antiochian Archdiocese of America’s Pilgrimage to Russia this year, our cast of 26 characters had individual stories and lives that rivaled those in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Most of our party traveled thousands of miles as individuals before arriving at Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg, Russia, on May 13, 2019. We began our pilgrimage unaware of what lay ahead in this land of mystery, that has been called the “Third Rome.” Only His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and Archpriest Thomas Zain, Vicar General, both of whom have deep knowledge of Russian culture and strong relations with the Russian Orthodox leadership for many years, knew what was in store for our party.

We arrived in the spring of the year, when the light is bright and remains well up into the night. Nothing of what I had read or pictures that I had seen prepared me for what I saw. Unlike the ashen faces of the people on the streets of my homeland, darkened by secularism, the faces of the old and young people on the streets seemed filled with hope and happiness as they walked past the stores, churches and cathedrals that are found in every section of the city. The countryside was teeming with activity. People lived, worked and socialized under the spires and crosses of centuries-old churches and monasteries that were open and full of people. Most striking were the many splendid, majestic places of Orthodox
worship, ancient and new, small and vast. The sorrow, sadness and destruction of the Twentieth Century of Russian history has been replaced in the Twenty-First Century by the glory of Orthodoxy throughout the land.

For this pilgrimage with Metropolitan JOSEPH and the clergy, the laity was designated as a delegation from the Antiochian Archdiocese, which included the Board of Trustees, Archdiocese Board members and spouses. Our successes, failures, passions and dreams made for great talk during long bus rides to distant monasteries and late-night dinners, but, in all of this, we knew ourselves to be devoted Orthodox Christians looking to deepen our faith by walking in a land far from our homes. This was a familiar place to be for most of the pilgrims, for they were of Middle-Eastern descent and had formed new and prosperous lives in America. None feel that the Antiochian church is in a Diaspora, but they also care a great deal for the present state of Christianity in their home countries. Not only were they concerned for the state of their souls, but also for the suffering Christians under persecution and the continued survival of the Church of Antioch. The hope was that we could find support and help through the Russian Orthodox Church and in return show support for their continued renaissance.

Accordingly, we held many meetings with Russian Metropolitans in both private and public settings. Public meetings were conducted during banquet times, held after Vespers or Liturgy. Great speeches of solidarity were given between many rounds of vodka, a great Russian tradition. Deacon John and the delegation sang beautiful hymns and prayer in Arabic with a Byzantine tone, while our Russian hosts joined in with beautiful renditions of
slavic praises to God. Metropolitan JOSEPH spoke movingly and with great conviction of the need for piety and holiness among the people and clergy. He extolled the strength and faith of the Russian people; it was their conviction, he said, which saw the Orthodox Church through the dark scourge of Communism, so that it might rise again and stand today in the glory of Orthodoxy.

No true pilgrimage would have been complete unless we stepped through the doors of some of the churches. Orthodox churches can be found from the Baltic Sea in the North, to the Black Sea of the South, and to the Pacific Ocean to the East, and they fill the countryside and town squares in between. Orthodoxy was established in Russia in Kiev in 988 through the inheritance of the Byzantine Empire. As the numbers of the faithful grew and churches were built, Tartars from the East swept through Russia and burned anything made of wood. Not until after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 and the rise of Ivan III, called “the Great” (not “the Terrible”—he was later), did Russia throw off the yoke of the Tartars. Ivan III married Sophia Palaiologina, the last
Byzantine Princess and she commissioned the building of the Dormition Cathedral, based upon traditional Byzantine architecture, in 1475. It was the first Church in Russia to be made with the new technique and materials of stone masonry with the help of Italian architects. Because of this change, other churches in Russia have stood the test of time. Their iconography conveys the knowledge of God even to those who are illiterate in the Slavonic language of Russia, like myself. Because of Ivan the Great's efforts to bring to Russia true Orthodoxy from the Eastern Empire centered on Constantinople, Russia came to be known as a “Third Rome.”

Each Church that we visited was permeated with the prayers spoken or said in silence by generations of faithful Orthodox Christians. Whether the church was used as a garage, for storing crops, a stable for animals, or a museum for antireligious and atheist artifacts during the Communist era, we sensed this history of reverence and the presence of God. With the creation of St. Petersburg by Peter the Great, we were reminded during our toasts with vodka, to go and serve the gift of life that we had just received to the churches, communities, and people of our homeland. The stories that we shared, the lessons that we learned, and the wonders that we witnessed all deepened our lives. All Orthodox Christians would be well-served by going on a pilgrimage during their lifetime to the Third Rome, Moscow!

The Liturgy of Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia. The service was conducted at Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. This, the largest and tallest cathedral in all Russia, reflects the tragedies and triumphs of Russian Orthodoxy. Originally built to commemorate Russia’s victory over Napoleon, it was destroyed and dismantled stone by stone by Stalin to be replaced by an edifice dedicated to himself. This idolatrous work was never built, but a public pool, deeper than any grave, was constructed on the site, until Russia’s Orthodox renaissance. Now the rebuilt Cathedral stands as the jewel of the Moscow Patriarchate.

On the appointed day, our delegation made its way through an underground labyrinth to enter the heart of the Church. There we witnessed a 125 bishops praying in the nave with the sound of angelic voices reverberating from the choir lofts. We could not help but lift our eyes and souls upward into the vast space of the nave and sanctuary, to soaring arches, great windows, and iconography of grand beauty. With each prayer said in Slavonic, Arabic, and English, we were drawn as the bride into the bridal chamber with the elevation of the Gifts. We contributed from the hands of metropolitan bishops and priests ordained by the apostolic succession of the Apostles. Even though we did not understand the spoken words of each prayer, we understood the direction and intent of worship of this glorious Liturgy.

After the Liturgy, we feasted with Patriarch KIRILL, Metropolitan JOSEPH, Metropolitan NEPHON, and Metropolitan HILARION. We were reminded during our toasts with vodka, to go out and serve the gift of life that we had just received to the churches, communities, and people of our homeland. The stories that we shared, the lessons that we learned, and the wonders that we witnessed all deepened our lives. All Orthodox Christians would be well-served by going on a pilgrimage during their lifetime to the Third Rome, Moscow!

Salim Aboud, Archdiocesan CFO
TALKS ABOUT FINANCES
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE WORD

Why is reporting so important to you?
I believe that in any organization, financial reporting is important, but it is even more important in a 501(c)(3), a not-for-profit, as our Archdiocese is classified. We rely on the generosity of our faithful, and the tithes and pledges of our churches to maintain the variety of programs in our Archdiocese. It is very important that our churches and members understand the many financial structures of Archdiocesan affairs. Our faithful need to know where their money is going, and the purposes for which it is used. To this end, I believe it is important to present clear, concise and accurate financial reports to the Antiochian community. Then the faithful can see what successful programs and departments these funds support. Members of the Finance Committee have met with each of the departments of the Archdiocese on several occasions. We have reviewed their mission, goals, and progress, and talked with each department chair about financial reporting and planning. This resulted in budget adjustments (both increases and decreases) to many of the departments. From this process, overall expenditures have been reduced and we have a clearer vision for each department moving forward.

However, this process must be ongoing and refined. Therefore, we created and are in the process of creating, with His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, the approval, several other committees, such as a “Financial Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee,” “Real Estate and Capital Improvement Committee,” and a “Charitable Outreach Committee,” to continue the work with each department, examine goals related to the budget, monitor progress on goals, and make budget recommendations to the Metropolitan, CFO, and Finance Committee. This work will take time to complete, but we expect to have a much better understanding of our financial picture and department needs.
moving ahead. Over time, it is our plan to report through The WORD magazine and our Archdiocese website on the various financial aspects of the Archdiocese, including all departments’ budgets, goals, and progress.

Where do the funds that run the Archdiocese come from?

Presently, 61% of the budget comes from parishes and missions, 20% from The Order of Saint Ignatius, 7% from individuals, and another 12% coming from convention income and other organizations.

For some time, it has been our vision and hope as an Archdiocese that church faithful would tithe to their parishes and the parishes would in turn tithe to the Archdiocese. I know that in some of the other jurisdictions the Archdiocese receives more than 10% of the receipts of their parishes to operate. Nevertheless, we are not 100% there yet, but we are making progress. These contributions and tithes sustain our churches and the programs of the Archdiocese.

This giving reflects the commitment of our people for their parishes and the commitment of our parishes to the Archdiocese. We do not operate in a vacuum. We are joined to each other by the Holy Spirit. We recognize that if we could all follow the example of the early Christians, who believed that everything came from God, and gave generously and happily to God and the Church in return, we would have no financial issues in any of our churches, and there would be no limit to what we could do as an Archdiocese.

Every year the Finance Department publishes all information as to income received and disbursements made. We have been working hard to provide more detail and description, so that everyone who contributes can see how their donations work for the Church and we might have total fiscal transparency.

What do you consider your greatest challenge?

In a word, communication. We could do a better job communicating with each other, parish to parish, parish to Archdiocese, and Archdiocese to parishes. Our parishes are growing, and many are doing wonderful works in the community; bringing people to Orthodoxy and caring for those in need.

Were we to communicate better, we would be able to replicate so many creative ministries and best practices all over the Archdiocese and World.

When we “hide our light under a bushel” we deprive each other of opportunities. I am passionate about wanting the Archdiocese and the parishes to be totally transparent with each other. Those parishes that have trouble finding treasurers and people to serve on finance committees should be helped by Archdiocese staff and volunteers with templates and guides. Our Finance Department is currently working to develop these resources.

We may have a problem in our Archdiocese with trust, as well. For example, when the Archdiocese Insurance Committee asked the parishes to provide the insurance information related to their properties it was to make sure that all churches were adequately protected. After three years of effort, we are still missing about 31% of our parishes’ information.

Another example of our communication issue involves the Archdiocese wanting to ensure that every family is provided a copy of The WORD magazine each month. Only about 30% of our churches have provided updated membership mailing lists to date. We need to work to close these gaps. One way is good communication.

On the Archdiocese level, we will be working hard to improve our communication, beginning with a monthly article in our WORD magazine and on our website. At the 2019 Convention my financial report will include more descriptive information regarding all the committees that work directly or under the Office of the CFO.

Though your position is full-time in depth and hours, it is a volunteer position. When you have a demanding banking job and a family to care for, why do you choose to do this work?

We all serve the Church with the talents that God has given us. Because I am a banker, I was asked many years ago to assist with an internal audit to review the Archdiocese finances. The Committee elected me Chairman. Many volunteers from our esteemed Board of Trustees worked with the Archdiocese staff and we did, in my humble opinion, a complete and thorough job at that time. Perhaps this was a reason that His Eminence, Metropolita JOSEPH asked me to assume this current great responsibility. With his love and trust, and that of our Board of Trustees, led by our Vice Chairman Fawar El-Khoury, I agreed to assume the role of CFO temporarily. My goal is to set up a system that will continue, using the best financial practices available. I believe we must not only be accurate, but beyond reproach. I do this work because it is important, and I want to contribute.

To be honest, I have been stealing time away from my family to do this important and sacred Archdiocese work. I recognize it as an opportunity to give to God from all my life experiences and secular work. I want my children to serve God, so I need to be an example. My wife Julie has been patient and supportive throughout this time. We do our best to give to God from all my life experiences and secular work. We need to know where we were, what we have, and where we want to go. We are being fully transparent as an Archdiocese and we welcome any questions, which can be sent to me directly at sabboud@antiochian.org. I ask that people be patient with me in responding. I also welcome volunteers and suggestions. God is working with and through His people in the Archdiocese. We can build it up together, with the parishes and the Archdiocese working side by side, and hand in hand. We are blessed with a God-loving Metropolita, God-loving bishops, God-loving clergy, a God-loving Board of Trustees, and God-loving people.

Let’s all work hand-in-hand to do our best to please God and to grow our beloved Archdiocese together as one.

As I repeated always to my fellow members of the Board of Trustees, and I stated to our beloved attendees at the Miami Convention, “When I see a parishioner putting one dollar in the Church collection basket, I want to make sure that this dollar is well spent.”

Finally, I have to say that I couldn’t have done all this work, and continue to do it, if it weren’t for the trust and love of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Our Board of Trustees, and the faithful of our beloved Archdiocese.

Listed below are the thirteen 2019 Francis Maria Scholarship Recipients listed alphabetically by first name. Each of these recipients received a check in the amount of $2,500.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>PARENTS NAME</th>
<th>PARISH</th>
<th>PARISH CITY</th>
<th>PARISH STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna Karos</td>
<td>Paul &amp; Cindy Karos</td>
<td>St. George Orthodox Church</td>
<td>W. St. Paul</td>
<td>MN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avita Abo-Elis &lt;li&gt;</td>
<td>Antoinette &amp; Vera Abo-Elis</td>
<td>St. George Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassandra Nehle</td>
<td>Fy Jodiash &amp; Catherine Nehle</td>
<td>St. Andrew Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chole Shawah</td>
<td>Robert &amp; Penny Shawah</td>
<td>St. Nicholas Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
<td>CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominick Milker</td>
<td>Carl Fredrick &amp; Tanya Milker</td>
<td>St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Van Nors</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elina Saikali</td>
<td>Fr. Minimous &amp; Rita Saikali</td>
<td>St. Antonios Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias Derb</td>
<td>Edward &amp; Louise Derb</td>
<td>St. Luke Antiochian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Grove</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Early</td>
<td>James &amp; Jennifer Early</td>
<td>St. George Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>TX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joselene Van Meter</td>
<td>Deanna Ferris</td>
<td>St. Mary Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>KS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Zafarana</td>
<td>Fr. Melkion &amp; Kla Rima</td>
<td>St. Mary Orthodox Church</td>
<td>New Kensington</td>
<td>PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadaill Ayoub</td>
<td>Nada &amp; Rania Ayoub</td>
<td>St. Antonios Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena Ruman</td>
<td>Mousa &amp; Baisma Ruman</td>
<td>The Basilica of St. Mary</td>
<td>Linsin</td>
<td>MI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana Salloum</td>
<td>Demetri &amp; Amale</td>
<td>St. Mary Orthodox Church</td>
<td>West Palm Beach</td>
<td>FL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On Sunday morning, I go to church. I go to a place of brick and mortar, open a door, and stepping); there are icons; there is incense, and a priest. There are lights, there is heat (or air-conditioning), it’s over: I have a donut and coffee and go home to when I go. One might be, “Yours from what is yours, we offer to you, in every liturgy and throughout everything,” reminding us that we serve God – the one who calls us to His table, offers Himself up, and feeds us – by offering ourselves to Him in everything we do.

It is with this in mind that we will, in the coming months, look at the Divine Liturgy with the hope of better understanding what is happening. Our ultimate goal is that, though we remain members of a parish community that comes together for bake sales and festivals, we also understand our place within a community that gathers to praise and glorify God. This is the God who calls us to His table, offers Himself up, and feeds us to give us the strength to go out and do those things which He has called us to do.

As Orthodox Christians, it is a beautiful thing when we come together in liturgy, and something remarkable happens. No matter where we are – Arizona to Africa, New York to New Zealand – we join the Body of Christ. Each community coming together for the Divine Liturgy gathers to receive the Body of Christ. It is this which forms the assembled community as the Body of Christ in their specific time and place. That sounds really cool, but something even cooler is going on. Something deeper.

During the liturgy of St. Basil the Great, immediately after the priest asks the Holy Spirit to descend on the bread and wine so that it might become the Body and Blood of Christ, he prays, “And as for us, partakers of the one bread and of the cup, do thou unite all to one another unto communion of the one Holy Spirit.” As we receive the Body of Christ, the community is formed into the Body of Christ. It transcends time and place because we join together with other communities formed into the Body of Christ. No matter where we are – as all Orthodox Christians receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we are grafted to the one Body of Christ, the community is united through our participation in the Divine Liturgy, culminating in our receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ. It unites us, no matter where we are, to our fellow Orthodox Christians.

Living in community with people can be hard. Sometimes people offend one another, or their pride is hurt. Sometimes people have different ideas and don’t know how to express those ideas, or how to find ways to work together. As we strive to live up to God’s likeness, community-building becomes the “work of the people.”

In the following months, we will look at the different parts of the Divine Liturgy, what is taking place, and how the Liturgy teaches us to live in community with other people. One hopes that this understanding would strengthen the way we experience the Divine Liturgy, how we experience others within our community, and, ultimately, how we experience God.

Gregory Abdalah, D.Min.
On Monday, July 15, 2019, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led a prayer service in the United States Capitol, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

The context was an event titled, “The Early Christian Church: An Ecumenical Prayer Service in the Languages of the Middle East,” and hosted by the Religious Advisory Board of the organization In Defense of Christians, of which Board His Eminence is a member.

His Eminence was joined by religious leaders who are based in the U.S. and represent various Middle Eastern churches, including His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian and His Orthodox Archdiocese of America; His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian and His Ecumenical Prayer Service in the United States Capitol.

On Monday, July 15, 2019, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and His Orthodox Archdiocese of America; His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

On Monday, July 15, 2019, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led a prayer service in the United States Capitol, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

The context was an event titled, “The Early Christian Church: An Ecumenical Prayer Service in the Languages of the Middle East,” and hosted by the Religious Advisory Board of the organization In Defense of Christians, of which Board His Eminence is a member.

His Eminence was joined by religious leaders who are based in the U.S. and represent various Middle Eastern churches, including His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian and His Orthodox Archdiocese of America; His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led a prayer service in the United States Capitol, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

On Monday, July 15, 2019, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led a prayer service in the United States Capitol, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

The context was an event titled, “The Early Christian Church: An Ecumenical Prayer Service in the Languages of the Middle East,” and hosted by the Religious Advisory Board of the organization In Defense of Christians, of which Board His Eminence is a member.

His Eminence was joined by religious leaders who are based in the U.S. and represent various Middle Eastern churches, including His Eminence Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian and His Orthodox Archdiocese of America; His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH led a prayer service in the United States Capitol, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives, the first time that an Antiochian Orthodox Christian Bishop has offered prayers in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The prayer service began, led by His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and various prayers were offered in the building which serves as the home for the U.S. House of Representatives.
The following churches have inquired about hosting a training session: St. George Orthodox Church, Fishers, Indiana; St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Toms River, NJ; subject: Technology in the classroom; St. Elias Cathedral, Ottawa, Ontario; Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church, Meridian, Idaho, considering Teacher Training.

 Lucas Petrillo,
Staff Assistant for Special Projects and Website

CREATIVE FESTIVALS 2020

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17

Jesus came into the world so that we could be rescued from condemnation. The name Jesus literally means “God saves.” He came to show us how we could be reunited with God. The Orthodox Study Bible states, “While Christ comes to save and not to condemn, man has free will. Thus, he can reject this gift and becomes condemned by his own rejection.” In his book, The Great “I Came” of Jesus, Fr. Anthony Coniaris states, “Before Jesus came, we were a fallen race. We needed not a judge to condemn us but a Savior to raise us from our fall. We needed someone to lift us, to heal us, not someone to judge and condemn us.”

Through the lesson plans, theme song, posters, suggestions for using the theme throughout the year, and other resources provided by the Department of Christian Education, the students will gain a greater understanding of this theme.

Rosmary Shumski,
Department Administrator for the Creative Festivals

VOLUNTEER STAFF SPOTLIGHT

ROBERT SNYDER

Robert Snyder, Director of Education Coordinator, Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest

Robert has been the Coordinator for the Diocese of Toledo for over 20 years, and is currently an instructor in Adult Christian Education.

The Department of Christian Education recently published The Great Feast Icons: The Life of Our Lord. This fun and educational block puzzle set can help children ages 6+ learn about the 12 Great Feasts as they turn the blocks to assemble the icons. The resource contains two 12-block sets to cover all the Great Feasts. The resource also includes a full-color picture book, with the stories of the events. It is listed at $19.95 and is available from the publisher, Orthodox Lighthouse, which also offers the “Holy Sacraments of the Orthodox Church” as a puzzle/book set. These can also be purchased from Ancient Faith Publishing.


2019 REPORT ON MINISTRY TO CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTORS

Our continuing series of interviews with Church School Directors across the Archdiocese, to date, seven from five dioceses, has been an excellent source of ideas for those in this ministry. Our thanks go to the following Church School Directors for participating in this program: Rebekah Yergo, Anna Rowe, Laia Ferris, Sammy Fuller, Arlyn Kants, Jennifer Buchko and Samia Zolnerowich, McNiel, and Oate. Their full interviews can be found on our website in the right sidebar, under “Especially for Directors.”

We have a database of over 150 Directors going into this new Church School Year. They receive an e-mail at least once a month, with updates on programs and events. We post more frequently on the Orthodox Church School Directors Facebook page – good questions and sharing. Our blog for small Church Schools, “The Mustard Seed,” had a six-fold growth in readership, which is fitting, given its name. Issues covered recently were “Creating a Church School for All” and “Organizing a Vacation Church School Program.”

Child Protection Guidelines. In order to encourage and support parishes in their screening of all volunteers working in our Church Schools, guidelines have been drafted by a committee of the Department. Parishes will receive a packet that will include an overview of the departmental standards, a suggested form for those who wish to volunteer, and information on child protection.

Anna-Sarah Farha, aocoe.csdirectors@gmail.com

LEARNING FROM THE CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS

By Anna-Sarah Farha

It was a pleasure to introduce readers of the April 2019 issue of The Word to the Church School Directors, as part of a series of interviews. We continued with the interviews and we have four more Directors to learn from. Notice how the leadership structure and responsibilities vary to serve the needs of the parishes best: Director at a mission parish, Co-directors, Leadership Team, and a Director enthusiastically stepping into his first year.

Nancy McNiel, St. Andrew Orthodox Church (Woodway, TX)

After she retired from teaching in the public schools, Nancy joined the Church School Ministry, musing that her job “apparently just got cut car-

ned over into working with children at church.” Nancy has been active in Church Schools for the past 20 years. Thank you, Nancy! At the time of the interview, the mission parish had 24 students enrolled in their Church School.

“Our curricula fluctuate with our needs. Our pre-school class works without specific curricula and helps the stu-

dents with the very basics, from making the sign of the cross, to stories and activities around the feasts or saints of the day. Our elementary class chose to use the “New Life in Jesus,” OCEC curriculum this year. We are using the new GOAROX 5th grade God Calls Us book. The last several years I have used the OCEC materials for 7th and 8th grade. When we were just beginning our parish and I was teaching all the students together, we used an excel-

lent O&I Testament curriculum developed by a deacon at our sister church in Austin, along with “Let the paper will comment that using the “Let Us Attend” with such a wide age group worked quite well.”

Jennifer Buchko and Samia Zolnerowich, Ss. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church (Potomac, MD)

Jennifer and Samia have been Co-Directors for 10 years and friends for over 25 years. For the 2018-2019 school year, there were 106 students registered for Church School and an average of 70 students attending weekly.

“When we be-

gan as directors, we split our du-

ties: Samia would be the contact person for the priests and teachers, and Jennifer would take care of the paperwork, registration, e-mails and newsletters. Now we both jump in and do whatever needs to be done. This helps when one of us is really busy with our families; there is someone that can take over for the other one. We love working together. We can plan together, brainstorm together and support the teachers. It also allows one of us to help out in a class when needed and leaves the other one in the office to be ready to answer questions for parents or church mem-

bers.”

Wafa Omeish, Principal for the Church School Lead-

ership Team, Saint George Orthodox Cathedral (Coral Gables, FL)

The Saint George Church School has an interesting lead-

ership structure. There is a Principal, Vice-Principal, and a team of officers and coordina-

tors. For the 2018-2019 school year, 73 students were enrolled. Wafa Omeish serves as the Principal. During the interview, she answered questions about several topics.

(Staff) Meetings are held monthly. An agenda is prepared by Sunday School officers, including review and approval of last month’s meeting minutes, liturgy report, principal report, finance report, public relations report, old business
and new business … The First Confession Coordinator incorporates material about the Sacrament of Confession into the existing 2nd-3rd grade curriculum over the course of 11 weeks. Students participate in First Confession on Lazarus Saturday and take Communion as a group the next day (Palm Sunday) as well as on Pascha. All participants dress in white. Parents are invited to join the students on Lazarus Saturday for a small reception to celebrate the occasion.\* 

Matthew Duncan, St. Mary Orthodox Church (Pawtucket, RI)

The 2018-2019 school year was Matthew’s first as Director, as he had previously served as a teacher for the teen Sunday School class and a SOYO advisor. St. Mary’s Church School needs approximately 50 students, separated into four classes, plus a bi-monthly liturgical music class. Additionally, the Church School explores creative ways to continue Orthodox Christian Education outside the classroom.

“We have started a series of liturgical demonstrations – led by Fr. Ele – either before the Liturgy or during the homily. Topics have included the preparation of the blessed bread, the censor, vestments, confession, and the cater. The aim is to give our students (and adults) a behind-the-scenes, nuts-and-bolts education about the Liturgy. And the more general aim is getting our students more involved in the Liturgical life of the church. To this end, our music teacher, Maureen Gurnham, has also led our students in singing the communion hymns during Communion. We aim to give them a whole liturgy sometime in the Fall.”

The full interviews with the Church School Directors are available on the AOCCE website in the “Especially for Directors” section (http://www.orthoca.org/category/christian-education/specialy-directors). I am grateful to all who participated thus far. Thank you for your dedication to Orthodox Christian Education. The interview series is continuing, so if you would like to volunteer or suggest a Director, contact me at aocde.directors@gmail.com.

DIOCESEAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COORDINATORS

Evanna Dacovan
Fr. George Alberts, 571.824.5016, frgeocar@sbcglobal.net

tolks and the Middle
Robert Snyder, 330.285.3688, bobsny1107@aol.com

to America
Ortiz, Evangelos; Canada; Upstate New York
ft. Christopher Ignatieff; Brasil; 519.307.2969, 127cr@gmail.com

Witches and M(11-2)11
See note, “The Archdiocese New Coordinator”
Deacon Elia Long, stongummer@gmail.com

Gi. Gigi Shadid, gigishadid@yahoo.com

Worcester and New England

Kh. Anna Timko-hughes, 978.686.3274, matannah@aol.com

Miami and the Southeast

Robert Snyder, 330.285-3688, bobsny1107@aol.com

Deacon Elisha Long, rlongsummer@gmail.com

Wichita and Mid-America

Fr. George Alberts, 570.824.5016, frgeocar@sbcglobal.net

Eastern Dioceses

Deacon Elisha Long, rlongsummer@gmail.com

Martha Duncan, St. Mary Orthodox Church (Pawtucket, RI)

The 2018-2019 school year was Matthew’s first as Director, as he had previously served as a teacher for the teen Sunday School class and a SOYO advisor. St. Mary’s Church School needs approximately 50 students, separated into four classes, plus a bi-monthly liturgical music class. Additionally, the Church School explores creative ways to continue Orthodox Christian Education outside the classroom.

“We have started a series of liturgical demonstrations – led by Fr. Ele – either before the Liturgy or during the homily. Topics have included the preparation of the blessed bread, the censor, vestments, confession, and the cier. The aim is to give our students (and adults) a behind-the-scenes, nuts-and-bolts education about the Liturgy. And the more general aim is getting our students more involved in the Liturgical life of the church. To this end, our music teacher, Maureen Gurnham, has also led our students in singing the communion hymns during Communion. We aim to give them a whole liturgy sometime in the Fall.”

The full interviews with the Church School Directors are available on the AOCCE website in the “Especially for Directors” section (http://www.orthoca.org/category/christian-education/specialy-directors). I am grateful to all who participated thus far. Thank you for your dedication to Orthodox Christian Education. The interview series is continuing, so if you would like to volunteer or suggest a Director, contact me at aocde.directors@gmail.com.

 Orthographic Combat Veterans

Barli Ross (BR), Director of Sales and Program Development at the Antiochian Village Conference Center, interviews Father D. Alexander (FD).

BR: From your experience as an Orthodox Chaplain, why is this retreat important and what need do you hope that it will fill?

FD: To be honest, this is something that came to us unexpectedly. Over the last few years, Orthodox military chaplains have been contacted more and more often by parish clergy and by family members of veterans, looking for something to help engage the veterans in their circles. Considering the requests, our response would have to be something authentic, something with guts, something ultimately and sincerely grounded in the Orthodox faith. It would have to be something led by people who have actually been in harm’s way in uniform — who have a touchstone for the night, feeling sandsthe dust, the seared images, the unexpected exhilaration, the crushing deflation, the unspoken loss, the disorientation upon homecoming, and the always-just-under-the-surface unrebreakable family bonds of combat veterans.

Our hope is simple. It is to bring the family together, and to stand before God shoulder to shoulder. 

BR: Who is the target audience for this retreat? Is there a reason to limit the attendees to those combat veterans of OEF and OIF? What if a Veteran from another era, say the conflict in Vietnam, wants to attend? Or what about a veteran who isn’t Orthodox?

FD: Fr. Isaiah Gillette and I will be the primary shapers of the retreat (Fr. Isaiah recently retired from the Army after 25 years, serving just about everywhere, and I have served twice in Afghanistan with the Marine Corps.). Fr. Sean Levine of the OCA will also be with us — he’s an Army chaplain with three combat tours in Iraq. Many priests in our diocese know Fr. Paul Abernathy, whose traumatic-informed community development projects in Pittsburgh have had such an impact. He’s an Iraq War veteran from the Army, and he will be a key contributor. Another Pittsburgh-area clergyman, Deacon Martie Johnson, served in Iraq with the Marine Corps, and he will be with us, also. Lastly, Fr. Mark Sabady, a retired Air Force chaplain with service in Iraq, will serve as our retreat chaplain and will lead us in prayer throughout our time together.

BR: Can you give readers a sense of what the retreat weekend will include, and what you are hoping to offer to our Orthodox veterans?

FD: More than anything, the retreat will be focused on coming together and forging bonds as an Orthodox family who have shared something in combat that few other people can clearly understand. That’s not to sound exclusive, and many people who have powerful and unique experiences in life find that it can be hard to relate those experiences to others. 

War tends to compress time. Every aspect of
emotion, instinct, action, and belief come together powerfully in moments of sheer liminality in war. Many veterans who live to be more than a hun-
dred count their moments in combat to be among the most powerful moments of their lives. (They also
tend to count the people who shared these moments
with them to be among the most important people
in their lives.) Many Orthodox veterans have served
their tours of duty without an Orthodox chaplain
nearby, and without access to many other Orthodox
Christians under arms. We believe that there is
an opportunity for us to make some of those connect-
ions now (at least to some extent), by coming to-
together for a few days to share our most powerful
experiences in a way that creates new bonds with other
Orthodox Christians, and helps us turn more fully
towards God.

Between the six of us who are leading the retreat,
I suppose there is some significant experience, and
brainpower, and a good amount of trained intuition.
I suppose there is some significant experience, and
and initiatives — and funding our retreat is just one
tiny example. However, anyone should feel free to
stay in touch with me about this. I can be reached at
dale@thesaints.com.

FD: No. We might be willing to entertain the
idea of a “family retreat” for veteran families in fu-
ture years (if we receive feedback that this is of wide
interest). We hope that our retreat will take place under the protection of St. Ra-
phael. St. Raphael’s living legacy is hard to describe,
to the Cathedral.

PAPAS, Noah, to the diaconate by Bishop THOM-
as on July 13, 2019, at the Cathedral of St. George,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Deacon Noah is assigned
to the Cathedral.

ROBINSON, Deacon Jesse, was ordained to the holy
priesthood by Bishop BASIL on July 7, 2019, at St. George Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Deacon Jesse is a student at St. Tikhon’s Seminary in

South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

SHADID, Christopher, to the diaconate by Bish-
op THOMAS and JOHN on March 6, 2019, at St. Mary Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and to the holy priesthood on June 1, 2019, at the St. Ig-
natius Chapel at the Antiochian Village. Fr. Chris-
topher continues to work at the Antiochian Village
Camp as an assistant director.

SIROTKO, Theodore, to the diaconate by Met-
ropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop ANTHONY on March 10, 2019, at St. Nicholas Church, Grand
Rapids, Michigan. Deacon Theodore is attached to St. Nicholas.

UNDERWOOD, Dn. Thomas, to the holy priest-
hood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on March 3, 2019,
at St. George Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

YOUNGBLOOD, Sub-deacon C.P. Charalam-
pos, was ordained to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on July 7, 2019, at St. George Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Deacon Charalampos is a student at St. Vladimir’s Seminary.

CARDINE, Priest Patrick, to the dignity of Arch-
priest by Bishops THOMAS and JOHN on March 17, 2019, at St. Patrick Orthodox Church, Bealeton, Virginia.

SHANBOUR, Priest Michael, to the dignity of Arch-
priest by Metropolitan JOSEPH on March 24, 2019,
at Three Holy Hierarchs Church, Wrentham, Massachusetts.

SHUMSKI, Deacon John, to the dignity of Proto-
deacon by Bishop THOMAS on April 29, 2019, at the Church of St. John Chrysostom in York, Penn-
sylvania, where he serves.

BETHONEY, Khouria Elizabeth, of St. George/El Paso, Texas, widow of Father Robert James Be-
theon, on Saturday, July 20, 2019.

DEMO, Priest Peter, retired in Florida but for-
merly of St. Anthony/Spring, Texas, on March 18, 2019.

NAHAS, Archpriest Herbert, pastor emeritus of St. Mary Church, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on April 7, 2019. Fr. Herbert was 100 years old.
A SACRAMENTAL LIFE

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival for the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest

Elizabeth Hubrink

Throughout history, our culture has become more and more self-reliant, and personal- al happiness has become the highest goal, and God disregarded. I find myself fall- ing into this mindset all the time. I try and work through my daily struggles on my own. I hold onto my pride and my judgement and my insecuri- ties and refuse to let go. I val- ue my own happiness above those around me. I’m sure I’m not alone. We all struggle with our passions and desires, we struggle to remember God and turn to Him in prayer. We’ve become self-reliant in- dividually, and as a culture. However, we can change this self-reliant perspective through the strength of God, because we can each say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Yet first we have to realize that we’re not here on earth for ourselves, but for the Kingdom of God. I remember my dad explaining to me that heaven and earth are not separated by death, but they over- lap in our life in the Church, the Kingdom of God, and, as Mark 1:15 says, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” Heaven is not far away, but a reality we can choose to live every day.

The life we live as Orthodox Christians – par- ticipating in the sacraments, attending services, singing and serving and lighting candles – begins our journey towards the fullness of heaven. In the sac- raments, God is the primary actor, but we must choose to engage and participate. The verse “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” does not mean that I can do anything if I just pray. It means that I can live a heavenly, sacramental life when I choose to allow the strength of God to work in my life. This is what I want to focus on today: be- ginning our lives in heaven and living a sacramen- tal life in three fundamental ways: embracing joy, letting go of our passions, and accepting suffering. To be honest with you, I don’t fully understand these concepts, but today I want to share with you my per- sonal experiences and a cou- ple of stories that have made an impact on me. One of the most life-changing moments of my life, when I felt God’s strength, was at the Antioci- an Village. We were celebrat- ing vespers a couple of years ago when I was flooded with an overwhelming sense of joy, and it hit me: this is heaven. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the church and of around me, and I understood for the first time in my life how insubstantial the world is compared to heaven. I’ve struggled a lot with my self-image and with feeling valued and accepted, but in that moment of true joy I felt God’s presence and I realized that the insecurities and judgements I was holding onto were insignificant in the presence of God. I started crying and I couldn’t stop. It was one of those experiences that impacted me in ways I’m still trying to understand today, but I know now that God brings heaven to us.

Joy is all around us, pointing us to God. It’s a glimpse of the fullness of heaven. By embrac- ing those moments of joy, we can participate in that sacramental way of living. There is joy to be seen in a smile, in a tear, in the face of a little child, in the wisdom of an old man. We just have to allow our eyes to be opened. As we struggle to embrace joy, we also have an opportunity to let go of everything that interferes with that joy: resentment, vanity, self-pity, selfish love, greed, loneliness, or jealousy. I have learned that however broken and lost I may be, I can turn to God and, through His strength, learn to let go of my passions.

One of the most impressive examples of this idea of letting go, I heard in Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick’s podcast, “My Sins Run Behind Me.” Here he describes the life of St. Moses the Ethiopian. St. Moses was born in 332 A.D. and became the slave of a government official in Egypt. At a young age he devoted himself to murder and theft. Eventu- ally, his owner freed him because he didn’t want the responsibility of watching over such a violent man. After his release, St. Moses became the leader of a gang, ruining lives, families, and childhoods. Then one day, God opened his eyes to the horrors he had committed. St. Moses ran away from his violent lifestyle. He joined a monastery and became deeply committed to fighting his sinful passions and strugg- ling to let go of them. He carried an incredible burden, all of the lives he had taken, but “no matter how wicked somebody may have been, he’s capable of repentance.” The strength of God humbled and changed St. Moses, and he learned not to rely on himself. He found heaven in the Church as a place of healing from his sins and, as when we are bap- tized, St. Moses cast aside the old man and put on the new, all through the strength of God.

“We’re all sinners here, we’re all wounded — we’re all in need of healing and correction.” By tak- ing our brokenness to God, we can learn to walk through life letting go of our passions, as St. Moses did. Still, life is not easy, and as we learn to lean on the strength of God, we will encounter pain and suffering and loss. The humblest way to let our journey towards the fullness of heaven is to embrace that hardship in service, like the martyrs did. I found one of my favorite stories of embracing hardship in Fr. Michael Shabour’s article, titled, “With My Own Eyes: Stories of Faith from Com- munist Prison in Romania.” Here he tells the story of a prisoner named Iscu. “Iscu had been beaten so severely that he only had days to live. After an ar- gument among the authorities, the man who had beaten Icsu was turned on by the other Communists and they beat him and reduced him to the state of a prisoner. Here lay Icsu’s torture, broken and dy- ing, not ten feet from the man he had beaten and broken. Then Icsu slowly, painfully, made his way over to the Communist man. He sat weakly on the bed next to his torturer and whispered: “You didn’t know what you were doing,” and forgave him for everything he had ever done. “Both men died that same night. It was a Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which [they] simply remembered that two thousand years ago Jesus was born in Beth- lehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.”

My experiences at the Antiocian Village and the lives of St. Moses and Icsu have helped me real- ize that, through the strength of God, even suffering can become an opportunity to love more perfectly. When I embrace joy, when I struggle to let go, and when I accept suffering, I live out a heavenly, sacra- mental life. Yet I can’t do it alone; I must recog- nize how fragile and sinful I am, and turn instead to the Church, to those around me, to the saints, and most importantly to God Himself. As Romans 3:23 states, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Through His strength and His mercy, how- ever, we can struggle to overcome self-reliance and to live our lives as the beginning of our heavenly journey. As St. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 12:10: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and ca- lamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

By allowing God to be our strength in this fall- en, self-reliant world, we can do things beyond our imagination. It’s not easy and I fail and struggle and fall every day, trying to trust in the strength of God, but I have learned from Isaiah 30:15, “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.” If I live like St. Moses and Icsu, embrac- ing joy, letting go of my passions, and accepting suffering, I live a repentant, sacramental life. I live in heaven now. And as I walk through life, carrying all the wisdom of those who have gone before me and all the strength of God, I can also carry the words of St. Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
A TABLE IN THE PRESENCE
RETREAT FOR ORTHODOX COMBAT VETERANS

Orthodox Christian combat veterans of OEF and OIF:

The dust remains on your boots and in your rucksacks.

Your fallen brothers remain in your hearts and minds.

Combat is a threshold that cannot be uncrossed.

Your stories are not easy to tell. Who can bear them?

BUT GOD KNOWS THEM ALL.
AND HIS LOVE FOR YOU ENDURES FOREVER.

Your Orthodox Military Chaplains

and some veteran clergy have planned a retreat.

No cost – just get to us, if you can. We’ll take care of the rest.

WE GATHER TO TALK. WE GATHER TO PRAY.
TO STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AND TO FACE GOD.

Columbus Day Weekend 2019 at the Antiochian Village

Funding provided by the Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch
To register, contact Barli Ross at barli@antiochianvillage.org