

# DIAKONIA

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA



SPRING 2016

Highlighting  
Diocese of Los Angeles & the West  
Diocese of Eagle River & the Northwest  
Including a Message from His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH



Mid-Winter Meeting of the North American Board.  
Hosted by St. Luke, Garden Grove, California  
Presided by His Grace Bishop JOHN, Spiritual Advisor March 6-8, 2016

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA

☞ A SISTERHOOD SERVING CHRIST THROUGH SERVING OTHERS ☞

# The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women Of North America

His Eminence, the Most Reverend JOSEPH,  
Archbishop of New York  
and Metropolitan of All North America  
and Hierarchical Overseer

## NAB Board

His Grace Bishop. JOHN, Spiritual Advisor

### Officers:

<b>President:</b>	Dianne O'Reagan
<b>Vice-President/ Project:</b>	Kh. Suzanne Murphy
<b>Recording Secretary:</b>	Sheryl VanderWagen
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Fadia Juzdan
<b>Public Relations:</b>	Melinda Bentz
<b>Immediate Past President:</b>	Violet Robbat

### Coordinators:

<b>Constitution &amp; Bylaws:</b>	Lauren Farris
<b>Humanitarian:</b>	Dorothy Tampary
<b>Membership:</b>	Mary Lou Catelli
<b>Parliamentarian:</b>	Anne Bourjaily-Thomas
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<b>Scholarship:</b>	Cindy Nimey
<b>Finance Committee:</b>	Laila Ferris
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### *Antiochian Women's Prayer*

*In the Name of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
O Christ our God, we are all pledged to  
serve Thee with our whole being.  
Help us to continue to work for Thee  
through our Church, without seeking praise,  
without seeking personal gain,  
without judging others, without a feeling that  
we have worked hard enough  
and now must allow ourselves rest.  
Give us strength to do what is right and  
help us to go on striving and to remember  
that activities are not the main thing in life.  
The most important thing is to have  
our hearts directed and attuned to Thee.  
Amen.*

**DIAKONIA** is a Newsletter of the North American Board of the Antiochian Women, an organization of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and is published quarterly.

## PUBLICATION GUIDELINES:

### Deadlines

- Please submit your articles by the first of the month prior to the month of publication so we can ensure they are included.

**To submit articles,** e-mail as a word attachment to:  
antiochianwomenna@gmail.com

### Submission Details

- Please include your name and the phone number where you can be contacted for questions.

### Content

- All articles must be of interest to or regarding NAB, Diocesan or local Antiochian Women.
- All articles may be edited for length and clarity.

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In each issue we will highlight one of the Dioceses. We encourage everyone, however, to submit news and articles from all Antiochian parishes of North America for publication in every issue so we may keep in touch with each other.

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## What is DIAKONIA?

The word **DIAKONIA** is a Greek word meaning *Service*, usually pertaining to service in the Church. The purpose of the Antiochian Women's organization is primarily spirituality and humanitarian service. In the words of our Founder, Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory, it is "**Theology in Action.**"

To read the DIAKONIA online, or for general information regarding the Antiochian Women, please go to the Antiochian Women website at:  
<http://www.antiochian.org/women>

To read past issues of DIAKONIA, go to:  
<http://www.antiochian.org/AW-DIAKONIA>

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His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE**  
**OF NORTH AMERICA**



Pastoral Message for the Great Fast 2016

*“Thy grace hath risen, O Lord and the illumination of our souls hath shown forth. Lo, now is the acceptable time; the season of repentance hath come. Let us cast down the works of darkness, and put on the works of light, that we may pass the great tempest of fasting and reach the summit of the third day Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls.”*

*(from the Aposticha of the Vesper Service for the Evening of Cheese Fare)*

We greet you with anticipation as we embark on the Holy Season of the Great Fast in preparation for the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The beautiful verse above embodies the true spirit of the Lenten Season as we begin our journey to draw nearer to God so that we may worthily rejoice in His Resurrection. We are called to “cast down the works of darkness, and put on the works of light”. We are all aware that the world in which we live presents us many opportunities to participate in darkness, that is, all pursuits which draw us away from God and are displeasing to Him. These are the works of Satan and his followers who despise the light, for the light shines brightly and reveals them as pure evil. But our Lord Jesus Christ is the True Light, and He has declared that we are “the light of the world.” (Matthew 5:14).

Why does the verse above refer to this season as the “great tempest of fasting”? A tempest is defined to be a violent and windy storm, and that is what we expect to experience if we truly follow a path of sincere repentance during this season. If we are sincere in this journey we will find ourselves tested in sometimes severe ways, since Satan will not let go of us without a serious battle. If we do not feel weary during this journey, then we are not trying hard enough. But this not a weariness of despair, but a weariness of hope, for we know that at the end of this journey, we will bask in the glory of the Light of the Empty Tomb.

We convey our most heartfelt love to you as we stand on the threshold of this most solemn season and we ask our loving God to bless you and grant to you a most spiritually rewarding journey of repentance.

Your Father in Christ,

+Joseph

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

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## Introducing the Officers for Diocese of Los Angeles & the West Diocese of Eagle River & the Northwest

### **Charmaine E. Darmour – President**



I was born and raised in Parma, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, where I attended our Antiochian parish of St. George. At age 22 my adventuring spirit took me to southern CA, and for the last 27 years I've resided in Orange County. I attended St. Luke in Garden Grove for the first ten years and ever since have been a member of St. Michael in Van Nuys. Although raised in a strong Orthodox family, it was my summers at Antiochian Village that made our faith personal to me. I'm blessed with five fabulous Godchildren, a loving extended family and a fabulous circle of friends. I sing in our choir, serve on our Parish Council and have served multiple times now as President of our parish Antiochian Women. For the prior two years I served as the Public Relations Director of our Diocese of Los Angeles & the West.

I look forward to us working together and getting to know as many of you as is possible.

### **Michele Baba – Vice-President**



Michele was born in Altoona, PA and grew up in Anaheim, CA, attending St. Luke Orthodox Church in Garden Grove, which is where she met her husband Danny. After their marriage, they participated in the founding of St. Mark Church in Irvine. Michele continued her deep involvement in the church life by teaching Sunday School for 15 years at both St. Mark and St. Luke and was an active parent in Teen SOYO at both parishes. She served as Ladies President at St. Mark and worked on many committees. She served as board member on the St. Nicholas Camp Committee for the past 12 years. Her involvement has included: director, arts and crafts, sports, and most recently as supportive medical staff. Michele received her Bachelor's Degree from California State University Long Beach. Her working career has included teaching at Prince of Peace Lutheran School in Anaheim and as an account executive for Shesido Cosmetics. For the past 16 years she has been employed by Saddleback Valley Unified School District, working in Special Education and Elementary P.E. teacher. She enjoys being outside working with children, especially her own: Lauren, Michael, Daniel, and Alexander. With their children grown, Michele and Danny now have more time together; they enjoy listening to music and attending concerts, especially those featuring her daughter who plays both the violin & viola. The last four years, Michele enjoyed serving on our Antiochian Women Diocese Board as Treasurer.

### **Lauren Malouf - Secretary**



Lauren is a born and raised California girl. In February of 1990, Lauren was baptized at St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA. While in High School, Lauren served on the Diocesan Teen SOYO Board in all capacities, including Diocesan President. In 2012, she received her Bachelor Degree in Elementary Education from Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts. Lauren currently teaches Second Grade at Satcoy Elementary School in North Hollywood, CA. When Lauren is not working she can be found watching the LA Dodger games. During the sad winter months (when Baseball is on hiatus) Lauren can be found reading, baking, and spending hours on Netflix. Her mother, Georgette, is her inspiration for being an Antiochian Women's Officer. Lauren grew up watching her mother actively serve the Church, and is anxious to do the same.

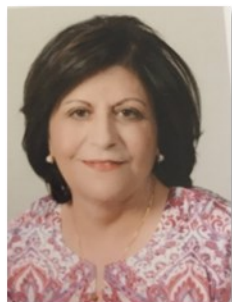
## Board Members continued

### **Ramona Blanski – Treasurer**



Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as Treasurer for our Diocese Antiochian Women. I was born in Mina, Lebanon, and moved to the U.S in 1992. I have been married to Rusty Blanski for 17 years and are blessed with two daughters, Alexandra and Christina. We attend Holy Cross Church in Palmdale, CA. I had the pleasure of pursuing a fulfilling teaching career for 20 years, and I am currently teaching chemistry at an early college high school in Lancaster CA. I also advise the rocketry club and Science Olympiad teams at my school. I treasure my time praying, reading the scripture as well as reading books about the life of Orthodox Saints. I also enjoy very much attending the women retreat, and getting to meet new ladies and grow spiritually together.

### **Diakonissa Suhaila Sweis – Public Relations**



Diakonissa Suhaila was born and raised in Jordan to a father who came from a lineage of Orthodox Priests since 1838 in the town of Fuheis. Suhaila is a dedicated mother who made sure her children never missed church. She received her Bachelor's degree in Business & Public Administration from the University of Jordan in 1975. In 1977 she married her husband Nishan Sweis (now a Deacon at St. Nicholas in San Francisco) and moved to San Francisco. As a career woman she worked for Bechtel Inc., UNICEF, and UNIFEM until setting out to start her own real estate brokerage 22 years ago. She and her husband Dn. Niphon attend St. Nicholas church in San Francisco with their three children and five grandchildren. She has served different areas in the church over the years including: Choir, Sunday School, Parish Council Member, and Ladies Auxiliary Chair for 9 years. She looks forward to continuing in service to God by serving others, and as an Antiochian Woman she is proud and honored to serve as your Public Relations Director.

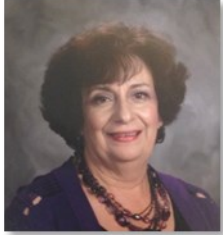
### **Very Rev. David Hovik – Spiritual Advisor**



I am the pastor of Saint Andrew Orthodox Church in Arlington, WA. I have been married to Kh. Debbie for 39 years and we have raised four children. Our oldest 3 are married and, between them, we have 10 grandchildren who all attend Saint Andrew and live in the Arlington area. Kh. Debbie is a high school special education teacher. I was an evangelical Protestant pastor for 19 1/2 years and a graduate of Fuller Seminary. After a six and a half year journey our entire parish was received into the Holy Orthodox Church, by His Eminence Archbishop JOSEPH, on February 8, 1997. I have also served as both a hospital and prison chaplain. I thank God for all his blessings in my life, which include overseeing all of the Antiochian Women in our Diocese.

## Board Members continued

### Georgette N. Malouf – Retreat Coordinator



The Orthodox Church and church community have been a part of my life since as long as I can remember. I grew up singing in the choir, teaching Church School and being very active in SOYO and eventually the Ladies organization. I went to college at California State University at Northridge majoring in Sociology. Being active in my local church, St. Nicholas in Los Angeles, lead me to meet, have a wonderful friendship, and eventually marry my husband of 39 years, Ed Malouf. We have three children, Christian, Natalie, and Lauren. I was fortunate enough to stay home with the kids as they were growing. When they started college, I began working at my children's elementary school (which was also mine) as a Special Education Coordinator and presently in the Administration Office.

I became active in our local Antiochian Women's Chapter at a young age. I loved being with and learning from the senior women of our Church. I have held all office positions of St. Nicholas ladies and in the Antiochian Women of the Western Diocese. I have also been active and held positions in the NAB.

### Diakonissa Joanna Townsend – Religious Coordinator



My name is Diakonissa Joanna Townsend and I am serving as Religious Coordinator. My husband, Deacon Mark, and I have been married for eighteen years. We have been blessed with two daughters named Tabitha and Genevieve. We attend St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church in Post Falls, Idaho where I am the lead chanter, and sing in the choir. My parent's, Fr. Nicholas and Malvi Neyman, raised me to be strong in the Faith. I work as a Registered Nurse administering chemotherapy and other IV infusions at the local cancer center. This job has been a blessing as it enables me to pray for my patient's as they fight their battles with cancer and autoimmune diseases.

### Christie Robinson – Humanitarian Coordinator



I was born in Santa Barbara, CA to Fr. Nicholas and Kh. Jan Speier. I grew up with my 3 brothers (Scott, Craig & Kevin) we were all Chrismated into the Holy Orthodox Church in February of 1987 at St. Michael in Van Nuys, CA. I have a wonderful husband (Chris) we have been together for 21 years and we are the VERY proud Uncle & Aunt to 19 nieces & nephews and 2 great nieces. We are blessed to call Santa Barbara and St. Athanasius our home.

I chair the Social Committee & the Women's Fellowship Committee at our parish and am active in our Coffee Hour as well. I am very honored to be the new Humanitarian Chair and look forward to forming many wonderful friendships along the way as we work to help those in need.

## Board Members continued

### Diakonissa Toy Ma'ae – Membership Coordinator

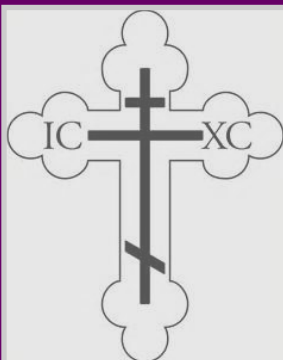


I'm honored to be the Membership Coordinator and looking forward to meeting as many of you as possible. A little bit about me. I'm a Mother to four and married to Deacon John Ma'ae. We are Parishioners of St. Barnabas in Costa Mesa, California and our family was brought into the Orthodox Church almost 13 years ago. I'm a licensed Real Estate Agent and also work for an international signage company. I enjoy building/creating furniture as well as refurbishing vintage pieces. Thrift store and antique shopping is an all time favorite of mine. My goal as Membership Coordinator is to share the Antiochian Women's important role within our Parishes and Diocese and encourage participation.

### Melinda Bentz – Immediate Past President



Who am I? I am a daughter, sister, wife, mother, God-mother and grandmother. I am the Choir Director at Holy Cross Parish in Palmdale, CA and have served as my parish AW President and Secretary. In my professional life I work for a pharmaceutical company as a Senior Account Manager. More importantly, I am the person who said YES nearly 12 years ago at a Fall Gathering. I said YES I could volunteer and serve on the diocesan board as Public Relations. I didn't know that much about the work of the Antiochian Women but I knew I could learn and I knew I wanted to be involved. That simple YES has enabled me to serve not only as NAB and Diocesan Public Relations, but also Diocesan Vice-President/Project and President. That YES allowed me to witness the great compassion, love, passion and servant hood of the ladies across this wonderful diocese. I have seen first-hand the work of small and large parishes as they have hosted Fall Gatherings and Parish Life Conferences and do so with loving hospitality and warmth. My current position of Immediate Past-President for the diocese is a wonderful position to continue my support of the work of this current board and our Diocesan Antiochian Women President, Charmaine Darmour. I currently also serve as the new NAB Public Relations officer. It is absolutely a privilege and honor to serve the Antiochian Women of North America. If you have not yet found us on Facebook – please look for Antiochian Women North America and like our page. Who are the Antiochian Women? It is every single woman in our God-protected Archdiocese. Who is qualified to serve? Someone who will say YES and will give the best that they have to give.



*+Memory Eternal+*

Give Rest to the Handmaid of God

Sherry Abraham-Morrow

NAB Finance Committee, Past NAB Treasurer,  
Diocesan and Parish leadership





## **Happenings Around The Diocese of Los Angeles & the West, Eagle River & the Northwest**

**By Diocesan President, Charmaine E. Darmour**

Across our Archdiocese the Sisterhood of Antiochian Women (AW) are busy in their communities supporting various charities, gathering in prayer & fellowship and supporting their local parishes & communities in an endless variety of ways. The Antiochian Women of the Diocese of Los Angeles & the West are certainly no different! Our Diocese is actually double size, extending all the way to the Great State of Alaska & including the provinces of Western Canadian, so the following is but a glimpse into all that is happening around our Diocese!

Tis the season...for Annunciation Teas! Across our Dioceses, several of our parishes hold an Annunciation Tea on the Saturday surrounding the feast of our Patron, the Theotokos. Although each parish has their own spin on this event, for all it includes prayer, fellowship & of course “tea & teacups!”

In Saskatoon, the AW of St. Vincent of Lerins, started a lending library as a means of sharing books on our Orthodox faith. What began as a small endeavor that fit on a large bookshelf has grown into a full room that includes icons, cards, incense and gift items. One of the greatest blessings has been in making books on our faith available to the women of the more rural areas who otherwise would not have accessibility.

Throughout our Diocese our Antiochian Women are very busy with humanitarian service acts of mercy remembering as we learn in Matthew 25:40 “Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.” At St. Athanasius in Santa Barbara they are very active in providing outreach to the homeless community with weekly dinners and distribution of hygiene kits, blankets, mittens & backpacks. Our sisters up north at St. John Cathedral in Eagle River, AK participate in many projects including collecting warm coats, hats, scarves & gloves for incarcerated women who are scheduled to be released. At St. James in Modesto, CA they too provide hats, gloves & scarves to the homeless, as well as serve dinner at the local Salvation Army. Additionally, the ladies of St. Ignatius in Mesa, AZ support families of single mothers & their children who escape domestic violence with food gift certificates, as well as serving meals to the hungry through a local community program.

In Calgary, our Church of The Annunciation has seen a significant increase in the arrival of Syrian refugee families. Many of these families arrive with only the clothes on their backs. The AW have been raising funds, and gathering furniture, household items, food, canned goods, blankets, clothes, and kitchenware to help establish these families and get them settled into a new life & homes.

Our AW also remember our own extended Orthodox community in many ways. At St. Luke in Garden Grove, CA they have raised funds to support three monastic communities and also financial gifts to our five Diocese seminarians. The AW of St. John in Orinda visited Mother Melania & the Sisters at Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, CA taking with them donations and supplies. At the Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos, CA they were blessed to receive a visit from His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH of Damascus. During His Grace’s visit the AW held a falafel luncheon with proceeds going to support sick children in his Diocese. Several of our parishes are heeding the call to prepare IOCC kits. As part of this effort, the ladies of St. Barnabas in Costa Mesa hand sewed 40 baby blankets. At St. Michael, Van Nuys, CA a son of the parish is currently deployed in Afghanistan, resulting in the AW adopting his US Army squad of 8 with care packages.

Of course, fellowship is an important aspect of being Antiochian Women and fellowship occurs in many forms. St. Luke’s AW enjoyed a movie night during the Christmas season. At St. Anthony in San Diego the ladies hold a cookie & ornament exchange. St. Mark in Irvine, CA, St. Luke, Garden Grove, St. Michael, Van Nuys all hold Christmas fellowship dinners. With many expectant moms, church baby showers are a way for the AW at Sts. Peter & Paul in Salt Lake City, UT to enjoy each other’s company.



*Continued from previous page...*

Often fellowship & spiritual overlap, as when the AW of St. Nicholas in San Francisco were blessed to go together to visit the Holy relics of St. John Maximovitch in San Francisco. In Phoenix, AZ, the AW of St. George gathered together to learn more about iconography from two gifted iconographers within their own community.

The AW of St. Nicholas Cathedral held their biannual Sweetheart Ball in February. It's the culmination of multiple events that brings together young debutants and their escorts from multiple parishes, primarily in Southern California and this year even one from St. Nicholas in San Francisco.

As we journey to the Paschal Season, the Antiochian Women stay busy with Lenten dinners, decorating Paschal candles, and planning for fast free Spring festivals & events. Always remembering that we are blessed to be, "A Sisterhood Serving Christ, Through Serving Others."



St. George , San Diego Cookie Exchange



St. Mark, Irvine CA at their After-Christmas Get-together



### JAM SQUARES

By Mother Melania

1 cup brown sugar  
1 1/2 cup flour  
1/2 cup oatmeal

3/4 cup margarine, melted  
1-2 cups jam – apricot or your favorite  
1 tsp soda

Mix all ingredients except jam.

Spread about 2/3 into a buttered 8x8 pan.

Spread jam. Sprinkle remaining 1/3 mixture on top.

Preheat oven to 350F. Bake 25 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool. Cut into squares and enjoy.

*NOTE – Recipe doubles easily into a 9 x 13*

## An Antiochian Woman ...even in Hawaii

by Pauline Magnusson from Holy Cross, Palmdale, CA

*There's an old philosophical question – if a tree falls in a forest and there's no one around to hear, does it make a sound?*

Similarly, if an Antiochian Woman finds herself 2500 miles away from her nearest sisters, does she cease being an Antiochian Woman?

I suppose if I reveal the circumstances of why I've found myself so far away from my beloved sisters, any remote inkling of sympathy you might have had a moment ago will evaporate...and that's okay.

My family and I usually reside in Kern County, California, and are parishioners at Holy Cross Antiochian Orthodox Church in Palmdale. This past year, however, brought a monumental change for our family. My husband, an officer in the Air Force Reserve, was activated for a year. Ordinarily, this means that he goes on a trip for a few weeks at a time, and I remain home with our four children.



This past year, however, due to staffing shortages, his chain of command asked if he might be able to perform a year of duty. Given that his primary duty station is in Hawaii, we jumped at the opportunity and have been enjoying the Spirit of Aloha for the past year.

With no Antiochian presence here, our adopted parish of Ss. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Pacific has been a welcoming parish family during our year of transition. I thank God for the love that Fr. Alex and Presvytera Nicole Leong have shown us. I'm especially grateful for the blessing of an Orthodox military chaplain here on Oahu as well, Fr. John Kalantzis and his wife Presvytera Michelle.

We've jumped into parish life amid our Greek and Hawaiian friends. From learning to make spanakopita to being spiritually fed weekly at their group for Orthodox moms of young children, it's been a delight.

One of the highlights of our year came through my oldest daughter's involvement in our parish's youth choir, the Wahine Aloha Youth Choir. In February, the choir competed in the GOA Faith, Dance, and Fellowship Festival in Anaheim, California, singing a mix of liturgical music and Greek folk music. Of course, being from Hawaii, they also performed a simple children's hula. Their choir director pointed out to me that one of the hymns in their set, *Before Thy Cross*, was in fact an Antiochian setting.

Knowing that was especially sweet when our choir was asked to give a second performance during the competition weekend for a very special audience made up of Archbishop Demetrios, Metropolitan Gerasimos, Bishop Apostolos, and other clergy and Greek media representatives. What an incredible way to experience a taste of the fullness of the Church!

I'll admit – even though Hawaii is rightly seen as paradise, it took me some time to get connected in both the parish and in my new role as an active duty military spouse. Shortly after our arrival in Hawaii, I was blessed to discover an example to follow in the life of St. Xenia of St. Petersburg – also the wife of a military officer. May God be praised in His saints!



*Continued from previous page...*

In her later years, after her husband's death, St. Xenia would often go to the house of a friend and in the middle of a conversation would jump up and say, "I must go! I am needed there!" and go off to wherever it was she sensed someone was in need.

My awareness of others' needs comes in much more ordinary ways. That said, recognizing and responding to the temporal needs of others has been a powerful way to bring the ethos of being an Orthodox Christian and an Antiochian Woman into this environment – even when I'm the only Antiochian Woman for miles around. If I open my eyes and am willing to see the needs of others, I discover...I am needed there!

The demands on our armed forces – both active duty and reserve – have been nearly nonstop for close to 20 years. This means there are countless opportunities to recognize Christ within people in the midst of their very real needs.

**Feed the hungry...**bringing nourishing meals to a young mother of three (including a baby) while she faces a new diagnosis of Stage IV breast cancer.

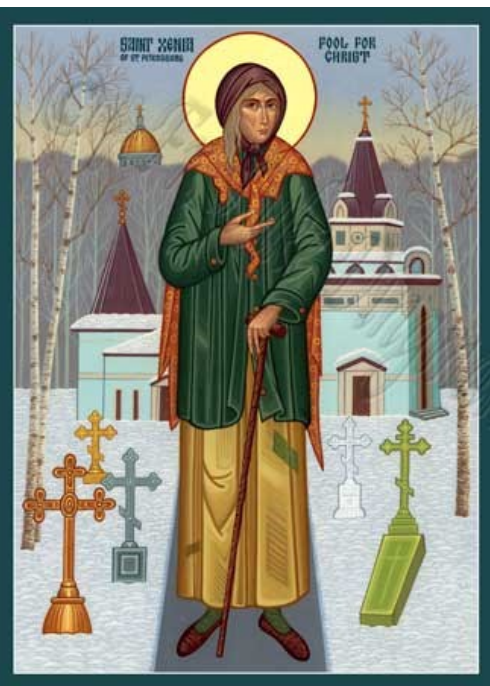
**Shelter the homeless...**providing a place for a wife to feel safe and relax during her recently returned husband's battles with post-traumatic stress disorder and the demons of war.

**Bury the dead...**grieving with a dear friend and her young children after her husband and 11 other Marines were killed in an unthinkable tragic helicopter collision.

Truly, Christ is in our midst!

My family's year in paradise is nearly at an end, though it will be followed by a more sobering experience of military life as my husband deploys shortly thereafter for the remainder of 2016.

As our family returns to the mainland, my hope is that we may embrace the example of so many of our saints and seek the places we are needed. As Antiochian Women, may we notice, love, and serve Christ in all, including the military members and families in our midst.



### **Troparion for St. Xenia**

Plagal of the Fourth Tone

in Commemoration of St. Blessed Mother Xenia of St. Petersburg

Commemorated on January 24th

*In thee, O wandering stranger, Christ the Lord hath given us an ardent intercessor for our kind. For having received in thy life sufferings and grief and served God and men with love, thou didst acquire great boldness. Wherefore, we fervently hasten to thee in temptations and grief, crying out from the depths of our hearts: Put not our hope to shame, O Blessed Xenia.*

Additional information on the life of St. Xenia and other Orthodox Women Saints can be found on the Antiochian Woman page of the Archdiocese website:

<http://www.antiochian.org/women/orthodox-women-saints>



## **Pray the Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children**

By Lorinda Fortuin of St. Anthony, San Diego, CA

*Raise my children, O Lady, to be made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven and make them heirs of eternal blessings"* From the Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children

What a great comfort the Mother of God is to us mothers if we avail ourselves to raise up our supplications to her and plead for her aid! Who better to intercede for our children than the Mother of all mothers? I truly believe the joy of her heart is to assist mothers in raising up their children in the way wherein they should go. She who gave birth to and lovingly raised our Lord from infancy to manhood is particularly able to relate to the concerns mothers have for their children.

These are perilous times for young people, for Satan is working overtime to ensnare our children in every variety of debauchery. There was a time in our nation when our Orthodox Christian values were encouraged and supported by society, wholesome values such as modesty, chastity, thrift, discretion, prudence, etc. Those days are long gone. The culture we live in now and the one in which we're raising our children has grown too toxic for parents to not be vigilant and quite intentional in cultivating Godly virtues in the children entrusted to their care. We parents need all the help we can get and it behooves us to seek help in our most blessed Theotokos.

As the mother of a former prodigal, I can tell you the Theotokos is a very real help in times of deep turmoil. I pray no mother would go through what I had gone through with my child. My story is one that has unfortunately been played out too frequently in these times of "live and let live". I have a child who got caught up in substance abuse and subsequently was expelled from not one but two high schools. A constant runaway, this child seemed hell-bent on self-destruction. There was many a night when my pillow was wet with tears from my despondency of not knowing where my child was or whether he was dead or alive. My dear friend, Jeanette Zarour, gave me a copy of the Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children during this time. While praying it, it was not an uncommon occurrence that the pages of the precious booklet were moistened with the anguished tears of this heartbroken mother. I know the Theotokos heard my prayers because I received the peace that surpasses understanding in the midst of that tumultuous time. My husband and I received wisdom and direction in regards to our child and through the intercessions of the Theotokos; our son eventually came to himself and embraced the Orthodox faith. The sky's the limit now. He attends a junior college and is eager to attend as many church services as possible. This would have been inconceivable to us just one year ago. How great is our God and how dear is the Mother of our Lord for answered prayer! If you are having similar struggles with a child you love, I want to encourage you to get a hold of a copy of The Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children and pray, pray, pray! The words of this prayer will sustain you and give you hope. When we pray we are engaging in spiritual warfare as stated in Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

With the assurance that our blessed Lady Theotokos does indeed hear our prayers and intercede on our behalf, we ladies of St. Anthony the Great parish, San Diego, CA have made a commitment to each other for our children's sake to gather together to pray *The Akathist to the Mother of God, Nurturer of Children* on a bi-weekly basis. Our gathering together to pray as sisters and mothers have been blessed and fruitful times for us. We know there is no greater good we can accomplish together than to raise up our voices in unity to ask the Theotokos for her intercession on behalf of the salvation of our children.

Perhaps God is calling the ladies of your parish to do the same.

## New Retreats Added This Year

By Diocesan President, Charmaine E. Darmour

Out here in the West, we are a “double-sized Diocese” that includes both the Diocese of Los Angeles & the West as well as the Diocese of Eagle River & the Northwest. That makes for a lot of logistical challenges when planning Diocese events. In the past we’ve only had one “official” Diocesan retreat, held each year during St. Mary of Egypt weekend in Southern CA – usually at Camp St. Nicholas.

This year as a means of reaching more of our Sisters in Christ across our Diocese, two additional retreats were added. In November, the Antiochian Women of St. Andrew in Arlington, WA hosted a retreat for the ladies in the surrounding parishes. The guest speaker, was Fr. Justin Havens of Sts. Peter & Paul in Salt Lake City, UT. Fr. Justin’s topic was “Give us a word, Holy Elder! How do the teachings of the Elders benefit those living in the world?” Over 50 women attended a day of spiritual growth & fellowship and next year look forward to holding a full weekend retreat!

Then in early February, the Antiochian Women of St. Ignatius in Mesa, AZ hosted a retreat for the ladies of the Desert Deanery and also the local Greek & OCA parishes. Once again, Fr. Justin was the Guest Speaker with a theme of “Living the Christian Life: How the Teachings of the Elders Enrich our Lives Today.” The day began at St. Ignatius with Morning Prayer and concluded with Vespers for the 65 attendees. After Vespers a group continued the fellowship with dinner at a local restaurant. We look forward to the Desert Deanery retreat also being an annual event.

God willing, the number of new Antiochian Women retreats around our Diocese will continue to grow.

Photo from Arizona Retreat



Photo from the Washington Retreat





## An Unexpected Home in Idaho

By Mibrak Gebereselsaie

My name is Mibrak Gebereselsaie and I am one of the Eritrean Orthodox now participating in receiving the word of God, and celebrating the Divine Liturgy at St. Ignatius of Antioch Orthodox Christian Church in Twin Falls, Idaho.

We came here as refugees not expecting to find an Orthodox church. However, God was gracious in giving us a home where we can pray and participate in the Liturgy just as we did back home. We are so glad to have a church here with parishioners who make us feel welcome and very much at home. As our parish continues to grow, it is our plan to expand and build a bigger church. I would like to say that we are more than happy to participate and help our church in any way we can.

May the Lord our God bless, protect and save our church, our community and all of our parishioners.





Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

*“Good repentance!”* These words are the words monks and nuns are accustomed to using when greeting each other especially during this season of Great Lent. Like any greeting it can be over used so that its meaning fades for us, but in two words it captures the intent of Lent and the fundamental teaching of the Gospel.

How astonishing it is that with all of our preparations for Pascha, we can manage to forgo this essential one! We fast, we attend extra church services, we give alms, we clean house, we buy new clothes, maybe we stay up late preparing special food. What is even more astonishing is that we go to Holy Confession and still... nurse our besetting sins, harbor old grudges, ignore the needy. For each of us the list is a bit different. But for all of us, how helpful a reminder how to the point it is when we hear these words addressed to us: *“Good repentance!”*

Mysteriously—and truly it is a mystery—we find it difficult to genuinely utter the words “Forgive me” and to change our ways. This is undoubtedly the favorite trick of the Evil One: to put fear into our hearts at the very prospect of doing anything that brings unparalleled peace and joy! Fasting, giving unstintingly of our wealth or our time, acknowledging wrongdoing are all examples. When we overcome our inner obstacles—by the Power of the Cross—and do these things, the reward is the peace of God and His joy. And we realize that nothing, absolutely nothing, is worth more.

If we have reached this point in Lent and not yet truly begun this principal work of repentance, let us take heart from the words of Psalm 102: “The Lord is full of compassion and merciful, long suffering and of great goodness” (First Aniphon of the Divine Liturgy). Two weeks remain as well as Holy Week; the Lord is patiently giving us time to prepare ourselves.

*“Good repentance!”* With these words we greet each and every one of you. May none of us arrive at the great Paschal Liturgy unprepared.

Abbess Victoria  
and the community of St. Barbara Monastery

[www.stbarbaramonastery.org](http://www.stbarbaramonastery.org)







Church of the Redeemer,  
Los Altos Hills, CA



St. Athanasius, Santa Barbara  
CA, assembling IOCC kits.



St. Michael, Van Nuys, CA

Assembling care package for deployed  
US Army soldier and his fellow troops.

St. Luke, Garden Grove, CA





## Images from the Mid-Winter Meeting hosted by St. Luke's , Garden Grove, CA.



Prayers offered for the souls of the departed.



Kh. Kyra Lewis participates in the book-club discussion.



Bishop JOHN listens to the discussion and reports.

Antichian Women President Dianne O'Regan reading the Epistle at St. Luke's for the 1st Sunday of Antiochian Women's Month.





# HUNGRY CHILDREN

at home & abroad

Reminder—Project money is due in May

HELP FEED  
HUNGRY CHILDREN

Antiochian Women  
2015-16 Project

NOW



### **A NOTE TO DIOCESAN PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTORS:**

All articles, news from parishes, photos, bios and messages are due the first of the month PRIOR to the month of publication. Please collect and email them to [antiochianwomenna@gmail.com](mailto:antiochianwomenna@gmail.com) according to the schedule below:

The following items are needed to highlight your diocese:

1. Bios and photos from your Diocesan Bishop, Spiritual Advisor and Board Members.
2. Messages from your Diocesan Bishop, Spiritual Advisor and President.
3. Photos and news articles from the chapters. All articles must be about or of interest to the Antiochian Women.
4. Notices of diocesan gatherings, retreats, conferences, etc.

	<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>Date Due</b>
1	NAB Board (His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, and His Grace Bishop JOHN)	October 2015	Done
2	Diocese of New York and the Archdiocesan District (His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH & His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS). Diocese of Charleston, Oakland, and the Mid-Atlantic (His Grace Bishop THOMAS)	January 2016	Done
3	Diocese of Los Angeles and the West and the Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest (His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH)	April 2016	Done
4	Diocese of Miami and the Southeast (His Grace Bishop ANTOUN)	July 2016	June 1, 2016
5	Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate NY (His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER)	October 2016	Sept. 1, 2016
6	Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest (His Grace Bishop ANTHONY)	January 2017	Dec. 1, 2016
7	Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America (His Grace Bishop BASIL)	April 2017	Mar 1, 2017
8	Diocese of Worcester and New England (His Grace Bishop JOHN)	July 2017	June 1, 2017

To ensure publication in the next issue, please submit your news and articles by this date.

### **A NOTE TO ALL OUR READERS:**

Thank you to the Diocese of Los Angeles & the West and the Diocese of Eagle River & the Northwest for their wonderful submission of articles, photos and recipes, without which this issue would not be possible. Your gift to us during Lent is very much appreciated.

Thank you to the parish of St. Luke, Garden Grove, CA for hosting our Mid-Winter Meeting and to all the ladies who traveled from across our Archdiocese to do the work we were called to accomplish. Thank you Your Grace, Bishop JOHN for presiding, sharing your wisdom and guiding us through our work.

I look forward to sharing with you the Diocese of Miami & the Southeast for our next publication.

Blessed repentance!

Melinda Bentz, Public Relations