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The Word

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The Word



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Letters to the editor are welcome and should include the author's full name and parish. Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions e-mailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR CHURCH SCHOOL CHILDREN

THE CHURCH SCHOOL TEACHERS OF NEW ENGLAND GATHERED IN JANUARY OF 2017 AT THE CHANCERY FOR A WORKSHOP SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. OUR WORKSHOP LEADER WAS DR. IONA POPA, AN EDUCATOR, PSYCHIATRIST AND PIOUS ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN. THE TEACHERS WERE CHALLENGED TO APPROACH THE CHURCH SCHOOL CLASS AS A KIND OF LITURGY, WHICH PARALLELS OR CONTINUES THE DIVINE LITURGY ITSELF. THE CLASSROOM IS A PLACE WHERE THE MOUNT TABOR EXPERIENCE IS BROUGHT INTO THE WORLD: A HOLY PLACE WHERE OUR CHILDREN WILL ENCOUNTER GOD; A SPECIAL PLACE WHERE WE TAP INTO THE LIFE OF THE TRINITY MADE INCARNATE BY JESUS CHRIST. AS IN THE DIVINE LITURGY, IN THE CLASSROOM WE USE ALL OF OUR SENSES.

Dr. Popa pointed out that children learn differently from each other. Some are auditory learners, others visual, and still others kinesthetic. By learning how our class and each of our children learn, we can be more successful in communicating the good news of Jesus Christ. To assess learning style, Iona suggested that we ask the children to give us directions to a place either in the church complex or to an area with which they are familiar. Those who are visual learners will describe landmarks. Those who are auditory learners may speak slowly to hear their own words or talk a lot as they process and conceptualize the journey. The kinesthetic learners will use their hands and maybe their feet in demonstrating how turns are made to get to the destination. Learning how they learn allows us to craft a more effective lesson.

Just as the liturgy utilizes our senses in helping us encounter God, so should our class lessons, applying the concepts and information with the learning styles of our students in mind. Our purpose is not reducible to conveying information. Our purpose is helping the children encounter God. We must be vigilant and creative, so as to not allow ourselves to be distracted from this essential ministry.

Creative learning activities may include role-playing, making puppet shows, having children interview each other, retelling bible stories as if in a modern setting, making up songs to convey important lessons, or prepar-

ing to share the lessons with parents or others. It is unrealistic to expect kinesthetic learners to sit still, or auditory learners to read in class. These learners develop and process differently than does the visual learner. Making these accommodations allow the children to learn successfully and come to know God.



Sometimes our children are too easily distracted from the message we are delivering. We should not forget our mission while coping with such disruptions. Instead, we should be creative in responding to them. Some children

The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTOUN

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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benefit from having a parent or teacher's assistant present to offer individual coaching during the class. Some teachers who were present at the workshop shared that they provide children with stress balls and pencils, so that they can keep their hands busy as they listen in the class. Others offer regular exams to challenge the children to stay focused. All of the teachers agreed that there was not time enough for their lessons to be distracted by disciplinary actions. Our goal is not discipline, but education.

Understanding the classroom as a kind of liturgy conveys both the importance of the classroom experience and the opportunity to encounter God. Like the priest, the teacher who is energized and excited about the message will convey this contagious enthusiasm to the participants of the liturgy and classroom. We could all benefit from taking the liturgy to our homes, play and workplaces, to encounter God there, and *praying that His Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.*

Bishop JOHN

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THE DOMESTIC CHURCH AS FOUNDATION FOR YOUTH FORMATION

By Bishop THOMAS and Peter Sweitzer

I WOULD LIKE TO PREFACE MY REMARKS TODAY BY NOTING THAT OUR STARTING POINT FOR A DISCUSSION OF ORTHODOX YOUTH FORMATION IS FUNDAMENTALLY AND PROFOUNDLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE PREVAILING CULTURE. THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ETHNICITY OR OUR OWN CULTURAL HERITAGE. RATHER, IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, HIS APOSTLES, AND THE HOLY FATHERS. WHILE OUR WESTERN CULTURE EXALTS THE INTELLECT AS THE SOLE ARBITER IN MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH, INCLUDING MATTERS OF FAITH, WE ARE PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH THE HEALING OF THE *NOUS*. THIS NOETIC ENERGY FUNCTIONS IN THE HEART OF EVERY SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY PERSON, AND ACCORDING TO THE HOLY FATHERS, IS TO MASTER AND CONTROL THE INTELLECT, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. THIS IS WHY OUR YOUTH EFFORTS ARE NOT CONCENTRATED ON PROVIDING RATIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE OR HIS GOODNESS. FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, WE EXPERIENCE THE CHURCH AS A SPIRITUAL HOSPITAL WHERE THE SICK COME TO BE CURED.



With that as our context, I would like to share the thoughts of a beloved pastor, Saint John of Kronstadt. When he was young, Saint John was not considered a good student. He became, however, an excellent teacher, because he had acquired the Holy Spirit in ascetic struggle.

Saint John understood that the primary tool in the formation of youth is love. Interestingly, he didn't speak of education in terms of knowledge, but rather of love, and sharing that love of Christ he had acquired with the youth he taught. Saint John considered love for children to be the foundation of a teacher's work – a foundation that is very often denied by modern-day so-called technicians of secular educational sciences and activities.

There is a wonderful account of Saint John and a mother who was complaining about the education of her children in the schools.

She told Fr. John, "Their teachers taught them everything they need to pass the exams and be clever."

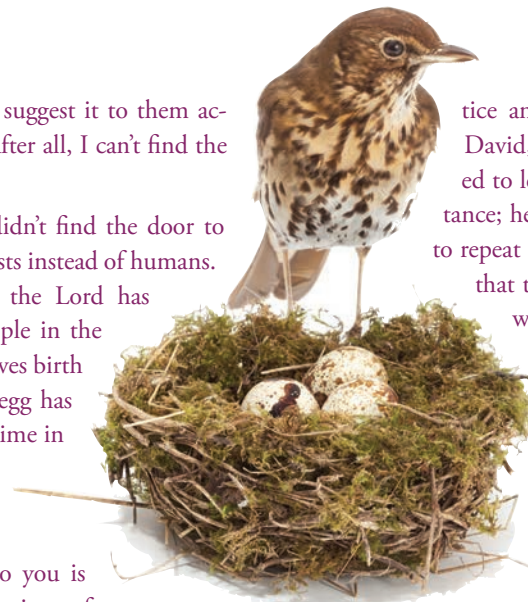
The Saint responded, "You should say that they pounded them and not taught them. When being pounded with spiritual knowledge, they have the same feeling as when they are learning arithmetic and so on. But how about you? Do you take care of their souls? Have you directed them so that, besides human approval, they would strive for God's approval?"

The woman answered, “I suggest it to them according to my strength. After all, I can’t find the door to my child’s heart.”

Saint John noted, “You didn’t find the door to the heart, so you’ll get beasts instead of humans. You have forgotten that the Lord has shown mankind an example in the bird species. A bird first gives birth to an egg, and until this egg has been kept for the proper time in maternal warmth, it remains an inanimate object. It is the same with people. The child born to you is that egg – with the beginnings of earthly life, but inanimate with respect to his blossoming in Christ. The child who has not been warmed by his parents and family to the root of his soul, to the root of all his feelings, will remain dead in spirit for God and good works. And it is precisely from these children not warmed by love and spiritual care that those generations come into the world, from which the prince of this world will recruit his armies against God and His Holy Church.”

As Saint John so beautifully illustrates for us, the beginnings of youth formation must begin in the Orthodox Christian home. As the domestic church, the home becomes the spiritual hearth by which the love of Christ is set aflame and stoked in the life of each child. The importance of this cannot be dismissed, especially if we consider the words of Saint John Chrysostom in his treatise on the education of children:

Therefore I beg you to take care for the good upbringing of your children. First of all, think of the salvation of their souls. God has placed you as the heads and teachers over your families. It is your duty to watch, and to watch continually after the behavior of your children. Listen to St. Paul. Educate your children in the teaching and instructions of the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:35, Ephesians 6:4). Imitate Job, who continually looked after his children and offered sacrifices for mercy towards any secret misdeeds they might have committed (Job 1:5). Imitate Abraham, who concerned himself less with the acquisition of riches than with the keeping of God’s law by every member of his house, and about whom the Lord witnessed: ‘For I know that he will order his sons, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do jus-



...tice and judgment’ (Genesis 18:19). David, when he was near death, wanted to leave Solomon the surest inheritance; he called him to himself in order to repeat the following wise instructions: that the Lord may confirm his word which he spoke, saying, ‘If thy children shall take heed to their way to walk before me in truth with all their heart, I promise thee, saying, there shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel’ (3 Kings 2:4). These are the examples that we should follow during our lives and with our final breath!

This urgent message must reach the hearts of Orthodox Christian parents who risk the loss of their child’s salvation if it isn’t heeded. If the home is not a domestic church, we have a responsibility at least to point it out to the parents. It means that we prepare to engage the parents and family members of our youth. A priestly home visitation, especially during the holy period of Theophany, may be a good place to start. If they are amenable to further discussions with the priest about prayer and the Orthodox life, we should do everything in our power to make it happen.

Additionally, we should have or at least know where to find the resources for a prayer corner, prayer books, and a modest library of Orthodox books and literature. Since our primary goal as Orthodox Christians is the healing of the *nous*, we engage our senses by venerating icons, offering incense, making prostrations, and praying the Jesus Prayer with the guidance of our spiritual father. All of these help in the healing of the *nous*, purifying it of the passions that so often enter through these same senses. This should be a daily part of youth formation in the home.

We can begin with those newly married couples who are not yet parents. It is our job to form them and to help them become godly Christian parents whose first concern is and always will be the salvation of their children. In discussing this issue, Father Geoffrey Korz, pastor of All Saints of North America Orthodox Church in Canada, has some excellent points that are worth mentioning. He notes, “If young adults (or not-so-young adults) do not love Christ’s Church, the question must be asked, what exactly has been the highest priority of



their home life? Academics? Getting a good job? Sports? Social life? Entertainment?” We can and should ask these questions of future parents, new parents, and older parents. Perhaps the most important point Father Geoffrey makes for those of us who are cradle Orthodox is this, “Orthodox kids in the western world are usually provided with two mutually exclusive and spiritually poisonous options: retain a foreign culture (language, name, history, etc.) as your primary identity, in order to somehow “keep” the Orthodox faith as part of that culture, or become westernized and leave your faith and culture behind.” The whole idea that Orthodoxy is ‘part’ of any culture is of course absurd, since two millennia ago, nearly every culture was thoroughly pagan. Even recently, many Orthodox cultures fell under the hypnotic effect of Communism, and today many are intoxicated with capitalist materialism.

Having a rich sense of inherited culture – whatever the culture may be – is a formative seed in the soul of a child, since a rich appreciation and love for inherited tradition prepares a child’s heart for Orthodox living. (Our faith is timeless, and requires inoculation against the passing winds of fashion). Yet a child’s first loyalty, the loyalty that must be cultivated and exemplified by each parent, is loyalty to the unchanging treasure of the Orthodox faith. If a young person thinks they have lots in common with other Orthodox people because they are Orthodox, there is a good chance they will remain faithful. On the other hand, if a child believes he has more in common with other peers who share their culture, whether those peers are faithful or not, it’s probably too late – the young person does not have an Orthodox

Christian self-image. Tremendous work will need to be done. I would add something to this – the youth’s self-image must be rooted in Christ, above and beyond a social support system of like-minded Orthodox. If we only speak about Christ and His Church, rather than speak to Christ while in Church, we have only satisfied a passing intellectual curiosity. Christian parents require as much faith formation and support as do the youth. Whatever we do, we should do with faith and love in order to awaken faith and love in others.

Obviously, these are just a few suggestions, and your priest will know best how to approach the parents. The point is that this is the frontline, where we have to concentrate our initial efforts in youth formation. If the Orthodox faith is not the primary influence in the daily life of the parents, it will likely not be any influence in the life of the children.

Now, occasionally the opposite is true, and we have to be prepared for this as well: I am speaking about situations where the children come to church for Divine Services without their parents. In some of these cases, the parents are not only unsupportive of their child’s faith, but openly hostile to it. These are particularly difficult situations that don’t afford us easy solutions. Once again, we can learn from Saint John of Kronstadt and the saint who sought his canonization, Saint John Maximovitch. Both holy men dealt with similar situations. In the instance of Saint John Maximovitch, he ministered and cared for orphans who had no homes whatsoever, and took in children after rescuing them from freezing to death on the streets of Shanghai in the 1930s. The saints employed similar approaches to these tragic

circumstances. The saints would love them as Christ would love them, essentially parenting them and mentoring the children themselves. Saint John of Kronstadt never tired of telling his students, “You are my children, for I gave birth to you and continue to give birth in you to the good tidings of Jesus Christ. My spiritual blood – my instructions – flows in your veins. You are my children, because I have you always in my heart and I pray for you. You are my children, because you are my spiritual offspring. You are my children, because truly, as a priest I am a father.” This is a tall order for all of us, and it presupposes that we are continuously struggling to purify our own hearts of the passions so that the love of Christ can shine through and be recognized by others,

tive factors have been identified it will be up to the parents to decide how to deal with these issues. It’s important, however, to recognize the important role we can play in these scenarios. We can help the parents identify the issues and propose solutions to them in helping them bring their children back to the Church.

This brings me to my next point. It’s a cautionary note for all of us engaged in youth work and pastoral care. The solution is not to be found in more programs and more events. While programs and events are good things, they are not a panacea for the healing of the soul and eternal salvation which is our goal in this life. We shouldn’t be tempted by other groups and organizations engaged in youth work, who create more programs and

To the extent that we are committed Orthodox Christians, we are such because at some point in our lives we recognized Christ’s love for us, and we desired union with Him so that nothing would separate us from the love of Christ. This isn’t an intellectual achievement, but a deep knowledge of the heart that nothing in life is preferable to the love of Christ.



especially the youth whom we hope to serve.

It is likely that the more common situation we encounter in the parish concerns the youth who express no interest in the faith, in attending Divine Services, or the spiritual life. If we are attentive, we can play an important role in these situations as well. In these instances, it’s important to determine what influences in the lives of the youth are making them indifferent or hostile to the Christian faith. Often, this will mean a sincere conversation with the parents, presuming that they are serious about the faith themselves. These influences may range from the youth’s peer group, their school, their choice of entertainment, or extracurricular activities such as sports that keep them away from the church. Once these nega-

events in order to distract the youth from other distractions. This won’t bring anyone to Christ and His Church. I am referring to programs that offer basketball and soccer programs and the like as a way to keep kids off the streets or away from bad influences. Again, these are not bad things in and of themselves, but they are not substitutes for faith in Christ which engages the heart and makes possible a true change in life. In our Archdiocese, we have many good programs that attract large numbers of youth, which is praiseworthy and should continue. Yet, if these programs aren’t undergirded by an authentic spiritual life so that Christ would be formed in their hearts (cf. Galatians 4:19), these programs are built on quicksand.

If the primary goal of Orthodox parents is the eternal salvation of their children, we must also spend some time discussing a child’s formal education. Before you examine a school’s ability to teach academics, however, it is absolutely necessary that you determine whether the school is Christian-friendly, Christian-tolerant, or anti-Christian. If you find the school to be Christian-friendly and capable of teaching academics, you may want to use it as part of your responsibility to rear and educate your children. If, however, the school is merely Christian-tolerant or is anti-Christian, it behooves you to look for other choices. Let me stress that in raising your children, it is their eternal salvation which should be at the top of your priorities. This is your responsibility before God.

Presently, there are two potential options apart from the public school system – homeschooling and enrollment in an Orthodox parochial school. Sadly, most areas of the country do not have an Orthodox school readily nearby. Orthodox communities that desire to start such an enterprise, however, should have available to them the contact information for schools that have flourished in their respective communities. Our Archdiocese has several such schools, one of which is The Saint Constantine School, located in the Houston area. Saint Constantine School is an independent Antiochian Orthodox Classical school and offers instruction from Pre-K through 12th Grade, as well as a College program that is accredited through The King’s College in New York City. At the collegiate level, Eastern University, located just outside of Philadelphia, has established the Center for Orthodox Thought and Culture. It is an excellent school with a solid Christian identity and campus life, as well as a strong Orthodox Christian Fellowship program.

Homeschooling is another good but challenging option for parents. Homeschooling has grown in popularity as well as organization in the last twenty years. There are some good resources available in print and online for parents who wish to explore this path. For instance, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America publishes *Praxis*, a homeschooling resource that is available online and in print editions. There is also a pan-Orthodox website available for parents who are thinking of homeschooling their children, “Orthodox Christian Education Resources.” It is a comprehensive site, with materials, curricula, and a network of like-minded Orthodox Christian parents for support. Within our communities we have the ability to pool our resources and pool our children together and expand a homeschool so that it becomes a mini-church, within which is an Orthodox school. In many homeschools, people are involved aside

from the parents.

Whatever we do, the parish priest must be in the center of this, as the priest must be in the center of all our lives as Orthodox Christians. If we are doing things in our lives that are separate from the Church and also without the blessing of Christ’s successors, then we are no better than that fallen system which we abandon. My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to live and learn together as a community that exists as a bridge from the heavenly to the earthly.

Beyond formal education, children require friendship and social interaction with their Orthodox peers in order to grow and mature. These relationships should have as their starting point and foundation a vibrant faith in Christ Jesus as revealed in the teachings and services of the Orthodox Church. Such friendships can be formed during the many camping programs offered by the Orthodox jurisdictions, as well as youth meetings and socials.

One final note on Orthodox Christian education: its goal must be the salvation of the child, and not just the maintenance of a private, safer alternative to public schools. It also shouldn’t be chosen because parents believe they will receive a superior intellectual education so they can succeed financially in life. That is not the purpose of an Orthodox education.

Whatever option is chosen for the education of children must be determined by the standard of the Gospel, and that standard is a continual striving for holiness and union with God. Child-rearing is a lofty and holy task. The educational environment in which a child is placed will have a profound effect on the rest of his or her life.

Permit me to ask a rhetorical question. What keeps a married couple faithful to each other? Is it the vows they spoke? Is it the fear of a messy divorce? No. It is love. The mutual love between a husband and a wife is what maintains the relationship in good times and in bad. Unlike what the secular world tells us, love is not a feeling but a daily choice. The same is true about the spiritual life. To the extent that we are committed Orthodox Christians, we are such because at some point in our lives we recognized Christ’s love for us, and we desired union with Him so that nothing would separate us from the love of Christ. This isn’t an intellectual achievement, but a deep knowledge of the heart that nothing in life is preferable to the love of Christ. We know this because we’ve experienced it. This is what will attract youth and keep them faithful to Christ in the Ark of Salvation, the Holy Orthodox Church.

Kamal Hourani is a seminarian at Holy Cross School of Theology. He is a graduate of FOCUS North America's YES (Youth Equipped to Serve) Program and has also become a leader in that program. To learn about how YES is shaping the leaders of our Church, visit www.focusnorthamerica.org/yes



FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, THE DIVINE LITURGY IS THE CENTER OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST. THERE IS NO GREATER BEAUTY, NO GREATER JOY, NO GREATER PRIVILEGE, THAN TO ENTER GOD'S HOUSE, SING HIS PRAISES, LISTEN TO HIS WORDS, AND TO BE UNITED TO HIM IN THE VERY BODY AND BLOOD OF HIS CHRIST. THERE IS NO HIGHER STATE FOR MAN THAN TO SIT AT TABLE WITH THE LORD AND SIMPLY TO BE WITH HIM, IN HIM, AND HAVE HIM IN US.

The sublimity of the Liturgy, however, does not mean that there is no other place on earth worth spending time. As Saint Maria Skobtsova writes, "Christ, in ascending to heaven, did not take the Church with Him Christ left the Church in the world. It was left as a small bit of leavening."

We Christians long for the age to come, when there will be no sickness, sorrow, or sighing. Our hearts ache to be with Christ. Sometimes we are so fed up with the suffering and horrors of this world, and we wonder why Christ would ascend and leave us here in the first place. Saint Maria's writing suggests one answer. We need a shift in perspective, not location. We cannot yet ascend to be in Christ's Kingdom, because His plan is to use us to bring His Kingdom down into the earth. He works with us to transfigure this world, as a baker transforms a

heap of flour with a little yeast. There is no need to wait for the end of this age. The end of the age is now, when we work with God to overcome the world's fallenness.

If we are going truly to be part of this Church, part of the leaven of the earth, we need to know how to express God's Kingdom on earth. Christ gives us the necessary instructions, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Saint Maria compares this beatitude to the monastic vow of non-possession. Just as a monk must renounce all earthly possessions, every Christian must push away the barriers that we ourselves put up, to keep God at a distance, and we must forsake the pride to which we cling, in order to avoid serving others. Saint Maria compares these to dirty rags that we must sell, in favor of the incorruptible richness of "laying down of our soul for our friends."

In the Divine Liturgy, in return for our offering

bread and wine, Christ gives His very self to us in the Eucharist. This mutual relationship of eucharistic offering becomes the icon for all of our relationships in this world. As Christ gave his life for us on the Cross, so we must give our lives for the sake of our neighbors. Just as Christ overlooks all of our imperfections, so must we overlook the shortcomings of our neighbors and serve them all the more. This work of serving others is the only way that the work of the Divine Liturgy becomes complete.

Each of us is constantly given opportunities to serve others. In our interactions with our families, co-workers, and friends, we can choose to be servants. We are also called to go out and actively serve the poor. While this sometimes takes a little more initiative, the spiritual benefits are unending. By giving our time, talent, and treasure to ministries like FOCUS North America, we are not only entering into community with the poor, but also training ourselves to be ready to serve whenever the Lord sends an opportunity our way.

In this fallen world, we may be hungry, thirsty, beaten, and stripped naked by tragedy and suffering. We may court spiritual death by seeking fulfillment only in the things of this world. Ultimately, however, only Christ can bring life to the world, meet our needs, and overcome our poverty with His riches. It is through *human beings*, even *us*, that Christ is manifest to the needy.

In our own life of love, we offer to our neighbors Christ himself, who heals the wounds of this world.

Christian charity, though FOCUS and other ministries alike, must not only address the physical needs of the poor, but also the internal poverty that comes from separation from God. When we hand a man a piece of bread, we also hope that he will be nourished by our love for him. When we give clothing to the naked, we hope that they will be wrapped in dignity as well. This art of loving the world takes a lifetime to master, but we must begin each day with a new resolve to engage in this universal Christian ministry of service. Approaching the chalice on Sunday cannot be a mundane chore that we check off each week. It has to be the fountainhead of the torrent of our love for the world. We must translate the liturgy in our parish churches into the liturgy *after* the liturgy, the one that takes place in the entirety of God's creation.

Kamal Hourani



*A homily delivered on
the Feast Day of the
Holy Family at St.
Benedict Western Rite
Orthodox Church,
Wichita Falls, Texas*



The Heresy of Individualism: A Lesson from the Holy Family

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

The greatest heresies in modern times are neither about God, nor about the Church. Rather, the greatest heresies today all have to do with humanity. In the past, the devil attacked the Church with arguments about the nature of God. For centuries, Orthodox Christians struggled to defend the dogmas handed down to them from the Apostles, that God is one essence and three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Eventually, the Church triumphed, and these beliefs are the core of Christian faith everywhere.

Christians have stopped looking at the world as sacramental. We forget that we are not just saved in spirit, but are also saved in body.

Today, however, Christianity is attacked on a different level. Our culture has forgotten what it means to be human. One doesn't have to look far to see this. On a national level, we live in a time when the government feels it has the authority to redefine marriage, family, and

even sexual identity. These are no longer considered to be truths entrusted to us from heaven, but as the whims of politicians and celebrities. The heresies of humanity, however, come even closer to home. Christians have stopped looking at the world as sacramental. We forget that we are not just saved in spirit, but are also saved in body. Our relationship with God involves our whole being, each of our senses, our taste (in the Eucharist), our olfactory sense (in incense), our hearing (in the peace and beauty of our worship), our eyes (in the pictures on the wall), our touch (in the holy water that cleans us) and the movements of our bodies (as we kneel and genuflect). There's nothing disembodied in Jesus Christ's

words, **"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"** (John 6:53).

Today, however, on this Feast of the Holy Family, the Church warns us of a particular heresy about humanity, and one of the most destructive and widespread

problems in modern Christianity – that is, the heresy of individualism.

What does this mean? You've all heard it said, "I believe in God, but I don't like organized religion." If ever there was a cheap cop-out, this is it. We like to blame religion for the problems in the world, when religion doesn't have much to do with it. People do. I do. We're quick to find excuses to distance ourselves from community, when all along we bring our problems with us wherever we go. I doubt there has ever been a time in history when Christianity was ever so individualistic. We think of religion like an aisle in the supermarket – just pick and choose what you take a fancy to, and when you're tired of it, try a new brand.

We value comfort far more than truth. We want a relationship with Christ, but not with my neighbor who stinks. We tend to forget that Christ is the head of the Church, and the Christians are His body: you can't have one without the other, or you would end up with a decapitated monster. A minister once put it well, **"The great Western heresy ... is that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us *alone* can be in right relationship with God [This] individualist focus is a form of idolatry."**

Here are a few quotations and verses that help us really to dive into this issue and explore what it means for us. Fr. George Florovsky explains: **"Christianity from the very beginning existed ... as a community. To be Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be Christian by himself, as an isolated individual, but only together with 'the brethren,' in a 'togetherness' with them ... Christianity means a 'common life,' a life in common."**¹

Another modern theologian, Fr.

Christos Yannaras, once taught about this spread of individualism that came about in the Protestant Reformation. He writes, **"With this change, Christianity became an individualistic 'religion' dominated by private convictions and the acquisition of individual merit."**² Traditional Christianity, he emphasizes, is about a unique life in community and love with God, His saints, and one another here in on earth. Otherwise put, to be a Christian is to be part of a family.

A monk named Abbot Tryphon, who lives in California today, published an article called "The Grass is Not Greener on the Other Side," in which he looks at how individualism has crept into Orthodoxy in America. He

writes: **"In an age when people change addresses as often as those in past generations changed their socks, stability of place is almost unheard of. When I was a young man, I moved from city to city quite often If my social life was on the rocks, I'd move. Reinventing myself in a new location became the norm But, as I grew older and wiser, I realized that the issues which needed to be dealt with had been avoided with each move, and if I were ever to grow psychologically and spiritually, I needed to put down roots"**

He continues, **"Frequently moving from one job to another, one relationship to another, one neighborhood to another, or one city to another, is a sure way to avoid spiritual growth Moving from one parish to another is ... a way many people avoid maturing in their faith Stick with the priest or confessor who really knows you. Spiritual transformation takes time, and changing confessors inhibits growth, since you waste time letting the new priest get to know you Constant movement allows us to hide from ourselves."**³

A priest from Romania once complained about the way Christians in America treat the Eucharist like a pill. Just swing by and pop it in and that's all you need. In Romania, to take the bread and wine with your brethren is a way of life, an attitude linked to your relationship with your brothers and sisters. It's a sharing that starts at the altar and spreads out to your parish, family and friends. If there's no sharing, there's no *grace*.

And what does Scripture have to say about all this? We begin to see what it means to be a human in the First Chapter of Genesis. As God sets out to create human-

The word "devil" in Greek is *diabolos*, which literally means: "the dividing one"; "the one who breaks apart." God brings unity; the devil brings separation.

ity, He declares: **"Let us make man in our image and our likeness"** (Genesis 1:27). The saints interpret this as proof that our very creation was communal – God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, put us together, and His image within us reflects the community of the Godhead. Our God is a unity of three Persons loving each other. In the same way, to be fully human is to live in a unity of sharing and loving.

One might say that God is like a family, and this familial character is imprinted in all of us. We will never fully live and thrive until we live as family.

But what goes wrong? The devil gets involved. The word "devil" in Greek is *diabolos*, which literally means:

“the dividing one”; “the one who breaks apart.” God brings unity; the devil brings separation.

When the Son of God was born a man on

walk out our faith as part of a parish family. If we want a private relationship with God, then we won’t get any relationship at all. It has to be shared.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard the story of Christ, the young boy, traveling with his parents, Ss. Mary and Joseph. God proves Himself to be a family man. He lowers Himself in order to live in the family

Chri-
mas Day He

offered us all a chance to get off the boat of brokenness and division, and to start living this new kind of life – a life of love and unity.

We forget sometimes, when we try to live Christian lives apart from a Christian community, that our Lord and Savior didn’t teach us to pray: “My Father, who art in Heaven.” Instead, He showed us the path with the words, “Our Father, who art in Heaven.” When He prayed to *our* Father, He implored, “For those who will believe in me ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You” (John 17:20).

You say that you are a Christian. Well what does that mean? The Book of Acts, Chapter 2, paints the picture vividly: “And they [the brethren] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes” (Acts 2:42–47). This is what it means to be a Christian. “There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:3–6).

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. Look at the Nativity Crèche, which we put up every year at this time. God did not come to earth as an individual isolated from the world. God came to us *in a family*. The Crèche is a reminder of what it means to be Christian. It’s a microcosm of everything that the gospel stands for. A free-floating Christian is no Christian. We can only

life, as a boy obedient to parents, and in doing so He raises family life into something divine.

Why is it, after all, that the Orthodox Church insists on closed communion? Why is it that we’re forbidden to take the Eucharist at a non-Orthodox Church, and non-Orthodox cannot take communion with us? Quite simply, it’s because of our radical belief in family. If we are to break bread together, *it must be in unity*, true unity, through sweat and work and perseverance, with patience and forgiveness, and a faith shared in every way. This is what it means to be human – to be family.

If you want union with God, then strive for union with your neighbor.

If you’re looking for Christ, then look in the eyes of the man and woman with whom you break bread.

If you want to become a good Christian, then turn to the Holy Family. It is there only that we learn how to live.

The Church is family. Our salvation is family.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh, M.Div., Pastor
St. Benedict Orthodox Church, Wichita Falls, Texas

1. George Florovsky, “The Church: Her Nature and Task,” in *The Universal Church in God’s Design*, vol. 1 (S.C.M. Press, 1948).
2. Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Press, 2006), pp. 23–25.
3. Ancient Faith Blogs, <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/morningoffering/2016/03/stability-of-place/>

OUR YOUTH TEACH US

Gregory Abdalah

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT “YOUTH ARE THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH.” WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE, WE TEND TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE FACT THAT THEY ARE ALSO THE PRESENT. FOLLOWING HIS BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION, A CHILD IS A FULL INITIATE INTO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH. HE IS GRAFTED INTO THE COMMUNITY – THE BODY OF CHRIST – THROUGH HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE EUCHARIST. TEACHING CHILDREN, BUILDING THEM UP ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, AND EXEMPLIFYING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TO THEM, BECOMES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. AS SUCH, YOUTH MINISTRY BECOMES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY. PARADOXICALLY, AS A PART OF THE COMMUNITY, THEY ALSO HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH AND TO HOLD THEIR FELLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS ACCOUNTABLE, AND THERE IS A LOT THAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM OUR YOUTH IF WE ARE OPEN TO HEARING WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY.¹

LITURGY AS RELATIONSHIP

Throughout our lives, we belong to a wide variety of communities. We have our immediate family, extended families, friends from school, sports teams, professional networks, fraternities and sororities, and various online communities. Within these communities, there may be sub-communities. We may belong to a large group of friends, but feel closer to some more than others. We may have a closer relationship with cousins of a similar age than those who are younger. Additionally, as we go through life, our communities may change and develop. Communities change with marriages and deaths; new life experiences often come with new communities. For Orthodox Christians, the Church becomes a constant in our lives. By definition, the Church is community. Though the faces may change, the familiarity of the services provides comfort and consistency. Our youth recognize the importance of the church community. They highlight three areas where this is borne out: their family, their relationship with their priest, and their role as a member of the community.

Family is perhaps the most important factor in determining church attendance. Parents play an important role in the liturgical life of their children. When asked, “What factors determine how often you attend?” 72% of surveyed youth had responses related to their families’ desire to attend, or their families’ health prohibiting attendance. Without their parents to drive them, most

children cannot attend. A working or tired parent could keep the family from attending church. In many homes, the mother is the one who is most often pushing for the family to attend. Of the 72% who referenced family, 18% identified their mothers as the ones determining attendance. The father, however, plays a much greater role in youth’s continued participation and attendance, most particularly for the boys. Having men attend teaches our youth how men behave in church, and that church attendance is part of being “manly.” Across the world, however, Christian church attendance is 53% female.²

For this reason, the relationship with their priest is of great importance. Of surveyed youth, 68% say that the relationship with their priest affects how they experience liturgy. One youth wrote, “If you have a good connection, you want to participate more.” Their reasons included, first and foremost, trust. Youth have an uncanny ability to see through someone if their actions are phony. This includes clergy. Youth will often default to trusting their priest until they feel that trust is betrayed or that the desire to interact with them is bogus. In their own words, “If I have a strong relationship with my priest, I pay more attention and enjoy the Liturgy more,” and, “If we have a good relationship, I’m more likely to pay attention.” Perhaps this is expressed most clearly by one surveyed youth who said: “The priest makes the service more meaningful and it’s great that he knows everyone’s name.” Youth know that they are full participants in the life of the Church – reminding them can be as simple as

Our youth recognize the importance of the church community. They highlight three areas where this is borne out: their family, their relationship with their priest, and their role as a member of the community.

1. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes and statistics included throughout come from my unpublished Survey on Liturgy (Fall 2016), currently in the form of raw data.

2. Brett McKay and Kate McKay, “Christianity’s Manhood Problem: An Introduction,” in their online book, *The Art of Manliness*, August 31, 2016, accessed on the Web January 9, 2017.

3. Basil Essey, ed., *The Liturgikon: The Book of Divine Services for the Priest and Deacon*, 3rd ed. (Ligonier, PA: Antakya, 2010).

4. T.S. Eliot, “East Coker,” in *Four Quartets* (New York: Mariner, 1971), p. 23.

5. Vasilios Thermos, *The Forgotten Mystery: The Ecclesial Consequences of Holy Chrismation*, trans. Peter A. Chamberas (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, Western American Diocese, 2016), p. 8.

knowing their names.

As important as the relationship can be, however, our youth teach us that we are called to attend liturgy no matter who is serving. Of youth surveyed, 32% said that their relationship with their priest does not affect their experience of the liturgy. These responses can be most aptly summarized in one response: “He’s chill, but I come for God, not anyone else.”

Perhaps most fascinating was that none of the youth surveyed responded that they felt excluded from liturgy when asked directly. At the same time, they were pretty evenly split when asked if they felt that they had a role in liturgy (55% yes, 45% no). When asked to describe that role, the majority of those who answered, “Yes,” wrote something related to attendance (being present, listening/learning, praying with others), while more specific answers included singing in the choir or serving as an altar boy. Interestingly, the majority of those who answered, “No,” wrote that they just show up but do not have a clearly defined role.

When asked, “In what ways do you participate in the liturgy?” and “Why do you participate in the liturgy?” the answers serve as an incredible lesson from our youth. Of the whole, 36% said that they participate because they have a responsibility/calling as an Orthodox Christian. Others stated praying (63%), singing (50%), or listening (36%) as ways they participate. Some included things that may not be traditionally viewed as liturgical participation, such as taking care of younger family members, or simply trying to remain focused. Perhaps the second most powerful statement shared was, “There would be no point in coming if I didn’t participate.” How often do we show up simply out of obligation? How often do we forget that relationships take effort, and that includes our relationship with God? Rather, as this quote reminds us, we are already there, we may as well make the most of our time with God!

Perhaps the most powerful statement shared was: “If no one came to liturgy, there wouldn’t be a church community, so we all have a role.” We all have a role within the community because, at the very least, we are a part of the community. With this understanding of relationship and the community, the liturgy teaches us – it reveals God to us.

LITURGY AS REVELATION

Our communities are of great importance because they form us – they make us who we are. Just like sponges absorb liquid, we absorb what we experience through our senses. We are affected by what we read and see on

the Internet, by interactions with our friends and family, even by the weather! The Divine Liturgy is designed with this in mind. Our relationships and the appeals to our senses all play a part in the experience of liturgical worship. The relationships we have with other members of the community, the architecture, the music that is used, the iconography, and even the incense, all play into what the liturgy reveals to us each time we participate.

For the revelation to be truly effective, three things are required: relief, refreshment, and reality. For many of our youth, the Divine Liturgy provides relief from their day-to-day anxiety and stresses. Liturgy can become for them a few moments of peace amidst an increasingly hectic lifestyle. It should not come as a shock that, when asked to list up to four things they think about during liturgy, school/homework was in the top three responses (41%). It was in the top five responses when they were asked to list up to four things that distract them from the liturgy (31%). Most simply stated: “Day-to-day life is different than the liturgy.” For many of the youth interviewed, the liturgy becomes a chance to focus on the various blessings God has given them in their lives (90%). It becomes an opportunity, as well, to look at those things where they can improve (36%). Ultimately, with relief from their usual pace, the Divine Liturgy becomes a safe haven, “an opportunity to be who we are supposed to be,” free of judgment. It is, then, the daunting task of the each community to ensure that this happens.

In solidifying our communities, grafting us all to each other as the Body of Christ, the importance of communion becomes paramount. Just as a family spending time together at the dinner table is an expression of familial unity, our joining together at the Lord’s table expresses our communal nature ... and our youth understand that. “Communion [is my favorite part of the liturgy] because everyone comes together and partakes of the Eucharist.” Of the surveyed youth, 100% recognized that the regular reception of communion is important. A sense of community and understanding of the relationships expressed in participation in the Eucharist were the second highest response to the question, “Why?” second only to “because it is the body and blood of Christ.” Furthermore, when asked to describe liturgy in ten words or less, 37% referred to our relationships with one another and the importance of the community. This communal meal – this refreshment – forms us into community and provides the relief described above, in that it drives home that we are all there for a common goal and purpose. As expressed in St. Basil the Great’s *anaphora*: “As for us partakers of the one bread and of



the one cup, do thou unite all to one another unto communion of the one Holy Spirit.”³

Finally, the sermon is incredibly important. The sermon has the potential to connect the liturgy to our daily lives. In fact, 72% of the surveyed youth spoke of the importance of the sermon at some point in their responses. One even said, “I try to take what I learn in the sermon into my daily life.” By the same token, they said that the sermon should relate to their reality. “It depends on the day and lesson. If it’s about owning a house, for example, it’s not applicable. I don’t own a house.” Another stated, “Sometimes I have no idea what is being said.” This should remind those entrusted to preach of two things. The first is that it is important to preach clearly. If the message is unintelligible – say, because of poor pronunciation, or inappropriate word choices intended to dazzle the hearer – the message is ultimately lost. People become unfocused and revel in their distractions, rather than in the Gospel message. Secondly, it is important to reach people on their level and elevate them. Someone struggling to pay their mortgage or battling cancer is not primarily concerned with the ontological consequences of the divine *exousia*. Neither are they interested in simply hearing, “God loves you, everything is going to be all right.” Rather, it becomes the job of

the preacher to teach the Gospel message in a way that bridges the gap between the theoretical and the practical, bringing the divine reality of the unseen into the reality that we see every day.

Ultimately, our youth yearn for authenticity. As we have seen above, this is expressed in their desire for authentic relationships within their families, with their clergy, and within the community at large. When this occurs, the liturgy expresses Christ authentically. The liturgy takes us out of the world and carries us along a path, beginning with our receiving the Word of God, and culminating in our receiving the Body of Christ. If the community is inauthentic, there is a higher potential that the liturgical expression will be interpreted also as inauthentic. As we see in the responses from our youth, we can be transformed by the liturgy, creating for us a new beginning each time we attend. We invert T.S. Eliot’s, “In my beginning is my end,” and say: “In the end is our beginning!”⁴ For this to happen requires our coming together cooperatively, because the “Orthodox life is not magic; it rather calls for cooperation.”⁵

Gregory Abdalah, M.Div., Youth Pastor
St. George Orthodox Church, Phoenix, Arizona
He is working on a Doctor of Ministry degree from
St. Vladimir’s Seminary.

The father, however, plays a much greater role in youth’s continued participation and attendance, most particularly for the boys. Having men attend teaches our youth how men behave in church, and that church attendance is part of being “manly.”

SHARING THE FAITH



BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

“This then, is our task: to educate ourselves and our children in godliness.” St. John Chrysostom

As you read this, Lent is approaching its mid-point. The service with the Veneration of the Cross is one of my favorites. I love the solemn procession and always find tears in my eyes. This season of the Church’s year, with Holy Week after, is an invitation to delve deeper into our relationship with our Lord by reading Scripture, working on dispelling negative passions, and by prayer and worship. As you can see, I have delved into the topic in the section that follows.

Lenten resources for parents and teachers are noted in the section, “Know Your Faith.” Also, Kristina Wenger will spend eight weeks, in both the Parents and Teachers Facebook pages and blogs, exploring how to teach the virtues. Make sure not to miss these posts, but keep in mind that virtues are not so much taught, as caught.

I offer a personal reflection at the end of these pages entitled, “Love and Logic,” based on an incident during the Christmas season. I hope it will bless those who can relate to my experience.

Finally, may we all keep praying, fasting, giving and struggling; “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross . . .” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Carole A. Buleza, Director

CONCERNING LENT, HUMILITY AND THE VIRTUES

Typically, we don’t have church school on Palm Sunday, and of course not on Pascha, and so it is difficult to teach about Holy Week, even if the lessons are included in our texts. We need to keep in mind that the defining events of our faith are the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We live in a society that, for the most part, accepts Jesus as simply a teacher of morals. Teachers, each year our children need to learn the events of the last days of Christ and our corresponding services. By addressing this every year, we send the message that Jesus is first of all our Savior: Jesus saved us from the bondage of sin and death, by His own death and Resurrection, and offers to us life in the Kingdom of God. The icon of the Resurrec-



The Descent into Hades

tion (“The Harrowing of Hades,” or “Descent into Hades”) is a wonderful teaching tool. Christ stands on the broken gate to Hades – the place of the dead – that He burst open with His Resurrection. Look at the darkness of Hades below Christ. There you find chains and nails – items of bondage – which teaches us that, because of Christ, we are no longer bound to death. He brings up Adam and Eve (representing humankind), who are now offered the Kingdom.

If you have children, make sure that they venerate the icon of the day upon arriving at church, and use it as a teaching tool. Parents, let’s reflect on our experiences of Lent and Holy Week – the fasting, attending services and praying more, donating to the needy – and be ready to share with our children a memory or a favorite hymn, service, or ritual. If our children don’t like one or more of the services, most likely we had the same feeling at their age. It is okay to let our children know we understand them, but let’s be firm about attending. I have a favorite Sunday, as I previously mentioned. Each year, as we headed to church that day, I made a point of telling them that it was Veneration of the Cross Sunday – my favorite. As the procession commenced I would make sure they were paying attention, and when it ended, I would bend over and whisper, “I love that hymn. Wasn’t that beautiful?”

The particular attitude we are sharing or learning with our children during Lent is humility. We learn humility primarily through fasting and repentance. Here are some questions to consider and then pose to our children to open a discussion leading to humility. Why do we fast? How do our bodies feel when we’ve been without food? And, what do we feel as we stand before someone to ask forgiveness? What makes these situations alike? Then ask them what the opposite situations and feelings might be (if they were always full to the brim, and didn’t ask forgiveness of anyone). We may need to introduce the words “humble” and “humility.” It may be an opportune time to connect humility with the prostrations we do in church.

Every Lent we learn (again) about humility. When we are content with material goods, well fed, and have at our fingertips (literally) the power to do so many things, it is easy to fall subconsciously into the trap of considering ourselves self-sufficient, and not accountable to anyone. It is a temptation that has been part of being human from the beginning, first seen in the book of Genesis when Satan lied to Eve, telling her that if she and Adam ate of the forbidden tree, “you will be like gods . . .” (Genesis 3:5). As we fast and pray, repent, serve others, and do prostrations, we regain humility. When we are humble, God is our Lord and Master, and we have the joy of a right relationship with our loving Creator and Savior.

Humility ranks first among the virtues. When we have regained humility, we can endeavor to gain the others. The gaining of each virtue is accomplished by expelling, or transforming its opposite, a vice. Lent is an opportune time to engage in this struggle which moves us further on the path of salvation. It isn’t easy to change, but we have the lives and writings of those who have gone before us. I have found a useful text to assist my struggle in Thirty Steps to Heaven: The Ladder of Divine Ascent for All Walks of Life, by Fr. Vassilios Papavassiliou (Ancient Faith Publishing). As the title states, Fr. Vassilios writes for all of us, not solely for monastics. Here is a nugget of truth that I highlighted on page 14 of the Introduction: “Complacency and self-certainty are the most dangerous delusions we encounter in the spiritual life.” Indeed!

DEPARTMENTAL NOTES

Our new blog!

ORTHODOX BABY HOMECOMING

Our blog offers ideas, tips, and knowledge to help you raise your children in the faith through the early childhood years. Recently I posted “House Blessings with Babies,” with two valuable links. In November I wrote a very personal post, sharing about my son who was stillborn at 20 weeks gestation, three years ago. The post is called “Homecoming.” Find our blog at: www.orthodoxbaby-homecoming.wordpress.com.

Maria McLoota Himes, Orthodox Baby Homecoming

AODCE SOCIAL NETWORKING MINISTRY

To nurture the children God has placed in our care!



Greetings! For Teachers and Parents the topic for this spring is “The Virtues.” We will be learning about the virtues, and sharing ways of teaching and transmitting them. As always there will be recommended books, and links to other sites.

Join in by commenting and sharing your own resources.

Kristina Wenger, Staff Assistant for Social Network Ministry



At Facebook.com

Orthodoxchristianparenting
Orthodoxchristiansundaychurchschoolteachers



At WordPress.com

Orthodoxchristianparenting
Orthodoxchristianchurchschoolteachers



www.pinterest.com/aodce

OUR NEW ASSOCIATE FOR CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTORS

We are pleased to have a new associate on board to support our Church School Directors through Facebook: Anna-Sarah Farha of Washington. Anna served as Vice Principal of Sunday School and the Creative Arts Festival Coordinator at Saint George Cathedral in Coral Gables, Florida, before recently moving to Seattle. Anna-Sarah and her husband and their young daughter worship at Saint Thomas Church in Snohomish.

Church School Directors, we hope to get a community together in which members can help one another by sharing their experiences. Check in with the Facebook page, “orthodoxchristianchurchschooldirectors.” If you have not registered for the listserv, please email the department, at aodce@aol.com with your name and parish.

UPDATE: The Pan-Orthodox Continuing Education Conference at Antiochian Village

It has been almost two years since we made a change to our yearly November event, *The Orthodox Institute for Continuing Education in the Faith*. First was the name change (see above), then a scheduling change – the event at Antiochian Village would occur every other year (the odd-numbered years) with *regional Pan-Orthodox Continuing Education Conferences* for the alternate years.

Indeed, last year we held three regional events, as well as other training events. Please note, however: we will NOT be sponsoring the Antiochian Village Conference this year. Budgetary constraints have made this decision necessary.

We will have money available for the Diocesan Coordinators to come to parishes for training events. For information on hosting, please contact Leslie Atherholt, Staff Assistant for Special Projects, at the Department: aodce.events@gmail.com

NEW INITIATIVE: PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The question of whether Church School teachers are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse has been posed to the Department a few times in recent years, along with the question, “Do we have guidelines for screening teachers?” The answer to the first question is that it depends on the state in which you reside. In Pennsylvania, yes, Church School teachers are mandated reporters.

As to screening, our SOYO volunteers are all screened, as are the teachers in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). It is time for us to follow suit. We do not presently have guidelines for screening teachers; however, the OCA Department of Christian Education has developed useful tools and information. In the next few months we will develop our own information on what it means to be a mandated reporter, and also screening guidelines.

Rosemary Shumski, Departmental Administrator for the Creative Festivals

CREATIVE FESTIVALS 2016

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17).

The 2017 Creative Festivals deadline is fast approaching! All entries must be post-marked by April 1st. Resources such as lesson plans, a theme song, and posters can help give students a greater understanding of the theme. They can be found on the Department of Christian Education website at www.antiochian.org/festivals/cf

Rosemary Shumski, Departmental Administrator for the Creative Festivals

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Our Antiochian website team has put together a great list of resources for Great Lent. It can be found at www.antiochian.org/lent. Be sure to investigate the links at the bottom of the list, in particular that of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA).

Melissa Tsongranis of the GOA Center for Family Care, and our special presenter at the York Continuing Education Conference, offers three resources entitled, “Preparing Your Family for Holy Week.” One is an article, and the other two are excellent webinars from 2015 and 2016. The discussions deal with children of all ages. You can ac-

cess these directly from YouTube. Two great texts (Zines for grades 6–9) can also be used as reference books: *Journey through Great Lent, and Journey through Holy Week*, both published by the GOA. Go to www.goarch.org, then use the search box.

The icon on page 18, “Descent into Hades,” is one of 40 icons in the resource, “‘Come Bless the Lord’ Icon Packet.” All of the major feasts are included; explanations are on the back of each. Order it from www.antiochian.org/publications.

ON LOGIC AND LOVE

A personal reflection by Carole Buleza

Not long ago I had a health scare. My doctor sent me to the hospital for observation and tests after an incident involving my eye. It was an easy stay, as I wasn’t in pain, and after two days I was released with three prescriptions that I will take for the rest of my life. My time in the hospital led me to mull over the situation. I thought to myself: if doctors wrote in clichés, the discharge orders might read, “dodged a bullet.”

I say this because my mother died at a relatively young age from the same condition for which I am now being treated. For her, it proved quickly fatal. She died when I was 19. The question of whether I would outlive my mother crossed my mind more than once, over the years. A look at our life stories shows that she and I shared more than a few “did-this-at-that-age” events. And now this . . . within two years of her age when she passed on.

My thoughts of dying too young did not occur often, and I didn’t give them much consideration. My mother had predisposing medical issues and a less-healthy lifestyle. I would not die of the same cause at least, according to my logic. Yet, here I was in the hospital and, frankly, I might have died. Yet I need not worry anymore, thanks to the test results, and medications. For this reason I felt blessed by the event.

The next several days were uneventful. Then one Sunday I was not myself at church. I did not feel like reaching out to new people as I usually do. On that day we went caroling at the Seniors Home, and instead of singing joyfully as I typically did, I sang quietly and wondered why I had come. The beauty of this season, the majesty of the Incarnation, and joy were not within me. The absence of joy, and the lack of feeling much of anything later led to a good cry and then to an appointment with a therapist.

“I do not care about anything,” I told her. “I need to get Christmas joy before it is too late, for my family’s sake,” I explained as I finished recalling to her my recent experiences. She focused on my crying episode and asked what my thoughts were at the time.

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

As I cried, I thought of my husband and children saddened by my death and going on without me. Next came thoughts of my mother’s absence. My husband and children never got to meet her. I didn’t have her by my side as I planned my wedding. Would my children have the same experience? And I found myself sobbing and saying repeatedly, “I don’t want to die.” Those were my mother’s last words to me. And now I spoke them.

The therapist quietly explained that my lack of caring and joy were two classic symptoms of having had a brush with death. Not investing in joy or in caring for others is seen as pointless by a person who believes he or she might not be around the next day. It all made perfect sense, but how was I to get Christmas joy this year? “Give it time. Cry more, and let yourself be angry,” she advised, “and keep in mind when we can’t get beyond our feelings, we need to use logic.”

“But logically,” I said loudly, “this wasn’t supposed to happen to me. I wasn’t in line to die from this condition.” I listed the differences between my mom’s health and lifestyle and mine. “So much for logic!” I retorted.

She countered by explaining that the logic I had held onto over the years was not equal to the new logic of my recent tests and preventive medications. Now, truly and logically, it is improbable that I will die of the same condition as my mother. She summarized by stating, “The two ‘logics’ are not equal – the new logic rests on science.”

“The ‘logics’ are not equal.” As soon as I said this aloud my mood lifted. I knew we had found the reason for my depression: if you can’t trust in logic the world is a place of randomness – and that is a fearful thing. With logic back in place, I could relax and soon my depression lifted.

I am fortunate in my position to have Orthodox books, articles and Bibles always within my reach. While reading an article about the life of Mother Alexandra, founder of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, an insight dawned. When Mother Alexandra died, her Bible was open to the following highlighted scripture. “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we

live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether

we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7–8).

St. Paul, who is capable of 35-word sentences, used only a few words this time, and said it all. His shorter version of that scripture, “*To live is Christ, to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21), is one that I have loved, but seeing its longer version triggered something in me; maybe it was the logical phrasing. Nevertheless, it supplanted my recent conclusions with the truth that *my salvation is all that matters – my life and my death are secondary to the fact that I belong to Christ*. He will care for those I love.

A few minutes later I came across another article which included the much-loved passage: “*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38–39).

I was stunned by those words, words I had read and heard many times. I sat back and read each phrase slowly, and then another time. Nothing can come between God’s love and me. That is where to place my trust. My final insight dawned: love trumps logic! Logic is of God, true, but Love, not logic, is what holds up the world.

Christmas came as scheduled, and I did indeed have the spirit of the season. For me, the hymns were richer in meaning, and the beauty was brighter. I found joy – Christmas, Paschal, and the every-ordinary-day variety, in the words of Romans 8. There is no joy greater than knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As I write this essay, we are well beyond Christmas. I still say that I am grateful for my experience. I am fine physically, but changed spiritually. Now I spend ten minutes in stillness before I leave for work and let the love of God enter my heart.

In the end, as St. Paul revealed to us 1 Corinthians 13, three things will remain (and logic is not one of them): of these three, the greatest is Love.

An address given at a luncheon at the Antiochian Archdiocese Chancery, honoring the Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, Monday, January 23, 2017



METROPOLITAN JOSEPH'S ADDRESS TO CARDINAL DOLAN AND OTHER GUESTS

Your Eminence Cardinal Dolan; Your Beatitude, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Esteemed Fathers, respected members of the Board of Trustees, and guests:

In the words of the Psalmist David, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Having celebrated recently the blessed feast of the Lord’s Nativity and Theophany, it is our pleasure to host you, and we joyfully welcome you to the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese. We have gathered today to pray, deepen our friendships, and to explore opportunities for collaboration in common areas of interest. Having greeted each other at events before, today we gather with Cardinal Dolan in particular, so allow me to greet him and welcome you all. We pray that this New Year brings us and our flocks peace, holiness and prosperity.

As we represent the various Christian bodies who believe in one Lord, one Bible and one Holy Spirit, and who have a solid and common foundation, I’m convinced that, through the exchange of ideas and experiences, these gatherings can produce unique and positive results as a united body in Christ.

In the United States, we enjoy many freedoms, but often find our faith and values under attack (for example, regarding abortion, sanctity of life in the later stages of life, same-sex marriage, and outreach to the poor). Moral liberalism and relativism, secularization and self-centeredness, greed and materialism are areas which beg for our united struggle. As human beings, we understand that we were created in the image and likeness of God, and that the very things I mentioned actually bur-

den and enslave us to our passions, and ultimately separate us from our Creator.

When our united Christian moral voice is heard and our presence is felt, we can have a positive effect on society. Everyone needs the truth of the Gospel. Certainly, we are working individually but we can work collectively too. Let us be heard, become known, and speak with one voice. The heartfelt prayers we offer through Divine Liturgy and Mass are beautiful and cannot be ignored.

The strength we gain from collective and individual prayers, however, can be translated into actions. St. James reminds us, “Faith without works is dead.” The world is under attack, not only in Paris, Egypt, Constantinople and Iraq, but in our very own country. Where is the outcry of the united Christian voice?

Syria, the country of St. Paul and of St. John of Damascus, of St. Annanias and the recent martyr Joseph of Damascus, of St. Raphael of Brooklyn who later established our holy church on these shores – this same Syria is under threat of losing her Christian identity and population due to an imposed war.

In Syria, Christians and Muslims coexisted peacefully. Christian leaders such as Patriarch JOHN X and the Melkite Patriarch Gregory often exchanged visits with their Muslim counterparts on high Holy Days and vice versa. This is the Islam we knew before the war in Syria. Islam, with all its radical and uncivilized ideologies, is said to be the fastest growing religion. Having been born in Syria, I can attest to you that this is not an authentic representation of true Islam.

With such close proximity to the United Nations

and Washington, D.C., considered the seat of power throughout the world, I believe we are obligated to be witnesses to the faith. I know that with a united voice, we can make a difference.

It is my sincere desire to establish a concrete dialogue and ongoing consultations about the Christian presence throughout the Middle East – Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine as well as Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey and the Arab Gulf. (There is no foreign policy addressing this; let us do it.) Equally important, and not to be overlooked, is the need to address together moral issues here at home, issues that affect the communities within our own country. Our guest today, Cardinal Dolan, has already paved the way by organizing days of prayer in his cathedral for suffering Christians throughout the world. Having personally visited Syria, Jordan and Iraq, he witnessed the plight of refugees and the destruction of this unjust war. Imagine how much more we could accomplish before the nation and our government as one united Christian voice!

God willing, I plan to continue in the footsteps of my predecessors in this Archdiocese in collaborating with many of you and continuing the necessary work which we have been ordained to accomplish. This luncheon is an expression of our love for you, with the intention of renewing our friendships before God, the church and each other. If you agree with what you have heard here today, let us plan to visit the very places together where Christians have undergone hardships. In so doing, we will bring them hope; we will ensure that the Christian presence in the Middle East will not disappear or be marginalized. Such a visit would be an effective tool in strengthening them, while bringing much-needed world-wide exposure to the challenges they are facing. To quote Patriarch JOHN X, “We don’t need special protection of Christian enclaves, we need peace.”

Pope Francis, who always remembers Syria in his prayers and speeches, just yesterday mentioned that “the war in Syria should stop right away!” In closing, let us remember Our Lady, the Most Holy Theotokos, and the countless saints who preached and suffered martyrdom in that part of the world. Most recently, as a result of the current war, we continue to pray for the two kidnapped bishops, Metropolitan PAUL and Archbishop JOHN of Aleppo, whose whereabouts are still unknown. We remember those from the previous century and the time of the Armenian genocide and from the massacres in Damascus in the 19th Century, including St. Joseph of Damascus.

I beg you, dear brothers, and I challenge myself, to

do no less than you have already done in order to preserve Christianity in the place where it began.

To our honored guest, Cardinal Dolan, “*Ahlan wa Sahlan*,” welcome!

+Metropolitan JOSEPH

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH HOSTS LUNCH HONORING TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN

On Monday, January 23, His Eminence hosted a lunch for thirty people in honor of His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, at the Archdiocese headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey. Orthodox and Catholic hierarchs, clergymen and laymen from the greater New York area were present, including Metropolitan TIKHON of the Orthodox Church in America, Maronite Catholic Bishop Gregory Mansour, Syriac Orthodox Bishop Mor Dionysius Jean Kawak, Syriac Catholic Bishop Yousif Habash, Archbishop Mor Titus Yeldo Pathickal of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the USA, and Bishop NICHOLAS of the Antiochian Archdiocese. Prominent laymen including Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice-Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, Mr. Adib Kassis, Managing Director of Middle East Airlines, and Mr. John Abi-Habib, owner of MSI Net, Inc., in Brooklyn, New York were also present, along with Greater New York area members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees.

During the reception and the lunch, a beautiful dialogue took place on ways those present could cooperate on moral issues confronting our country, and especially on the plight of Christians in the Middle East. Metropolitan JOSEPH gave a wonderful welcome to Cardinal Dolan and thanked him for his work and concern for the suffering people of the Middle East, most especially those suffering from the ongoing war in Syria. He challenged all present to work as a united body before the government and as a witness to the world, to show that we care and that our deep concern for peace in the region does not go unrecognized.

Metropolitan JOSEPH then presented Cardinal Dolan with a jeweled icon of Our Lady of Kazan, and Cardinal Dolan presented the Metropolitan with a pictorial book of the newly renovated St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. Other hierarchs also spoke and thanked Sayidna JOSEPH for his hospitality. In the end, all agreed that they must work together for the sake of the suffering people of the Middle East.

Metropolitan GEORGE Awarded Lebanon's National Order of the Cedar



The President of Lebanon, General Michel Aoun, awarded the Most Reverend Metropolitan GEORGE (Khodr) of Byblos and Botris (Mount Lebanon) the National Order of the Cedar – Commander, in recognition of his Eminence's contributions to Lebanon, the Orthodox Church and the world. He has proven himself an exemplar of patriotism and humanitarianism.

The ceremony took place on January 31, 2017, at the presidential residence, in the presence of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, and state ministers Jacob El Saraf, Pierre Rafoul, and Nicholas Tueini. Also present were the representative Ghassan Mkheiber, officials and advisors from the presidential office, and family and friends of His Eminence.

His Eminence gave the following speech:

I thank you, Mr. President for this recognition, reflecting your generosity. No one deserves to be as highly esteemed as Lebanon. We humble ourselves, however, to accept this act of appreciation. This is a great country, Mr. President; it does not need anyone to glorify it; this country is glorified since the

beginning of history, when Solomon the Wise said, "Come with me, bride from Lebanon." He was outside the country, but he was taken by the magnificence and beauty of the land. We are called to be great because of Lebanon. We thank God for giving us this country. The glory of Lebanon is in our hearts, if we obey it. This demands a great loyalty.

One deserves Lebanon only if one is loyal to it. Thank you, Mr. President, for choosing whom you chose. This is so because of the nobility in your heart, which you have inherited from Lebanon. I hope that I prove worthy of this medal, and that I will remain humble in the presence of the Lord and the brothers. May Lebanon be great.

The president also gave the following speech:

One cannot stop thinking of what to say in his honor, in the presence of this great eastern ecumenical personality, a wealth of knowledge for the Orthodox Church, Lebanon and the whole world. Should we honor Metropolitan GEORGE (Khodr), as a great theologian, philosopher, or social worker, or as the one who holds the torchlight in the time of darkness and isolation?

For over fifty years, the sermons, articles and speeches of His Eminence were a vertical connection between human beings and their Creator. They also fostered a horizontal link between people. He is as an apostle, leading people to God and His knowledge.

There are not enough words to be said about the great Metropolitan GEORGE. His achievements are like the loaves of Jesus Christ, satisfying the hungry with knowledge, goodness, love and the beauty of Lebanon and thereabouts, in a time when we need to return to that wisdom in order to be saved.

May God grant you many years to come, and inspire us to follow in your steps.



2017-01-31

الرئيس عون مقلداً وسام الأرز الوطني للمطران خضر: "سابقاً ما جاد به كآرغفة السيد المسيح، التي تشيع إلى المعرفة والخير والحب والجمال في لبنان والمنطقة".

نص الخبر عن صفحة <http://www.presidency.gov.lb>

في بادرة تكريم خاصة، قلّد رئيس الجمهورية العماد ميشال عون متروبوليت جبل لبنان وجبيل واليترون وما يليهما للروم الاورثوذكس المطران جورج خضر، وسام الأرز الوطني من رتبة ضابط اكبر، تقديراً لقامته المهيبة، عطاءً وحضوراً وفعلًا في لبنان والكنيسة المشرقية والعالم، رمزاً وطنياً جامعاً، في اللاهوت والفكر الانساني والانتماء اللبناني العربي الحضاري. وجرى حفل تقليد الوسام، قبل ظهر اليوم في القصر الجمهوري في بعبدا، وحضره بطريرك انطاكية وسائر المشرق للروم الاورثوذكس يوحنا العاشر، والوزراء يعقوب الصراف، بيار رفول ونيقولا تويني، والنائب غسان مخيبر إلى جانب كبار الموظفين في القصر ومستشاري الرئيس عون، ومدعوي المطران المحتفى به من افراد عائلته واصدقائه.

كلمة المطران خضر

وبعد تقليد الوسام، القى المحتفى به المطران خضر كلمة جاء فيها: "شكراً فخامة الرئيس. هذا تقدير يأتي من كرمكم، لا يستحق احد ان يكون في مقام لبنان، غير اننا نتواضع لتقبّل الأكرام. هذا بلد عظيم يا سيدي، ليس بحاجة لأن يعظمه احد. هو كبير منذ بدء التاريخ. عندما قال سليمان الحكيم: "تعالى معي يا عروس من لبنان"، كان هو خارج هذا البلد، لكنه أخذ به بسبب ما فيه من بهاء وجمال، أي من وعود بالكبر. نحن مدعوون بسبب من لبنان ان نكون كباراً. فالحمد لله الذي اعطى. وله المجد فينا اذا كنّا مطيعين للبنان. وهذا يتطلب اخلاصاً كبيراً.

انت تستحق لبنان فقط اذا اخلصت لله وللبلد اخلاصاً واحداً. شكراً فخامة الرئيس وقد اخترتم من اخترتم. وهذا لا فقط بسبب من الكرامة التي فيكم والتي اتخذتموها من لبنان. ارجو ان اكون مستحقاً ولكني ساحاول ان ابقى متواضعا في حضرة الله، وفي حضرة الاخوة. وليكن لبنان عظيماً".

كلمة الرئيس عون

بعدها، القى الرئيس عون في المحتفى به، الكلمة الآتية: "في حضرة هذه القائمة المشرقية الاممية العملاقة، وما تختزنه من تراث يشكل كنزاً ثميناً وسخياً، ليس للطائفة الارثوذكسية فحسب انما للبنان والعالم. لا بد من التساؤل عمّن هو احرى بالتكريم والعرفان.

أهو المطران جورج خضر، ام اللاهوتي الكبير، ام المفكر الفيلسوف، ام المصلح الاجتماعي، ام حامل شعلة الضوء والرؤيا في زمن الظلمة والانغلاق؟

أكثر من نصف قرن من الزمن شكّلت عظاته ومقالاته وكتاباته في الدين والفلسفة والاجتماع رابطاً عمودياً، ما بين الانسان والخالق، ومدّاً افقياً عميقاً ما بين الانسان والانسان، وكأنه جاء رسولا في مهمة تعريف البشر بالله وبأنفسهم.

كل كلام بهذا المطران العظيم يبقى قليلاً، وسابقاً ما جاد به كآرغفة السيد المسيح، التي تشيع الجباع إلى المعرفة والخير والحب والجمال في لبنان والمنطقة، في زمن لا ينقذ العالم فيه سوى العودة إلى ما راكمه هذا الفكر من غذاء روحي لا ينضب. اطلال الله في عمرك سيدنا المطران العلامة، والهمنا السير على خطاك".

حفل كوكتيل

وفي ختام حفل تقليد الوسام، اقيم كوكتيل للمناسبة وجرى التقاط الصور التذكارية.

عن صفحة <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/News/Pages/Details.aspx...>

STRENGTHENING THE MINISTRIES OF OUR CHURCH

“FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU, BE NOT DISMAYED, FOR I AM YOUR GOD; I WILL STRENGTHEN YOU, I WILL HELP YOU, I WILL UPHOLD YOU WITH MY VICTORIOUS RIGHT HAND” (ISAIAH 41:10).

The theme of our 2017 Antiochian Women Project, “Strengthening the Ministries of Our Church,” reminds us that we must put our *faith* into *action*. As St. James forcefully proclaims (James 2:14–17),

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

The various “ministries” of our Church breathe life into our faith – this is exactly how we put our *faith* into *action*.

This theme encapsulates the sweeping vision which Metropolitan JOSEPH shared with us at the summer meetings in July. His Eminence spoke with farsighted boldness and passion about the many challenges and opportunities which lie before our God-protected Archdiocese. His vision is of a vigorous Church, actively proclaiming our faith in Jesus Christ and lovingly ministering to the broken world around us. This is already a description of the ministries in many of our parishes, but to keep moving forward while broadening our active ministries, we must reinforce and strengthen our foundations.

The Antiochian Women are always ready to “encourage, support, and fund” the godly ministries of our Archdiocese. We have proved this, time and again, with our many generous fundraising projects over the past 43 years. This year’s project gives us an opportunity to make a significant contribution to *strengthen the fundamental ministries* of our Archdiocese.

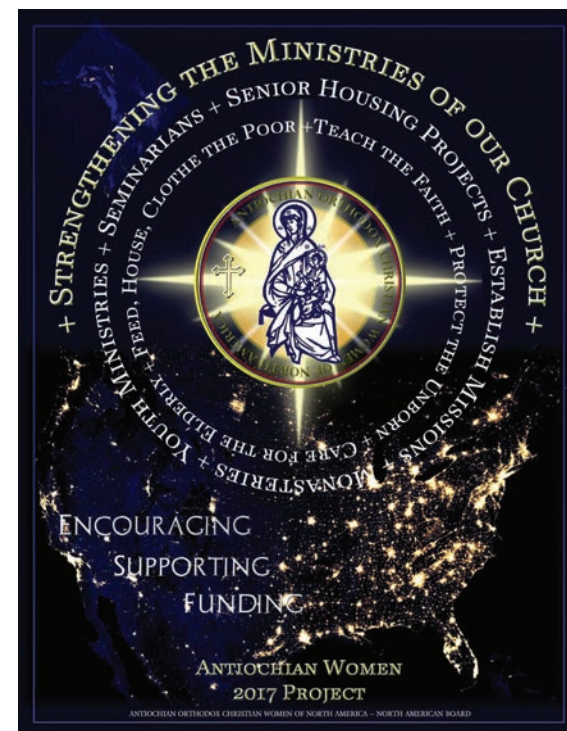
In the project poster, the lights of the cities and towns across North America represent the thousands of faithful men, women, and youth of our Archdiocese, showing forth the Light of Christ through their selfless ministries within the Church and to the world around us.

The funds we raise this year will go to strengthen the

following ministries in our Archdiocese: planning senior housing projects; founding missions; supporting seminarians; encouraging youth ministries; protecting the unborn; teaching the Faith; caring for the elderly and those in prisons, nursing homes and hospitals; helping to feed, house, and clothe the poor; and inspiring monastic vocations.

As the quote from Isaiah assures us, it is God’s strength which will enable us to “make firm” the foundation of His Church (Ephesians 2:19–20). His Eminence has given us perhaps the most far-reaching and wide-ranging challenge of any project to date. It is a tremendous challenge. God has inspired Sayidna JOSEPH with this vision; God will strengthen us to do our part. We must put our *faith* into *action*! Thank you for your efforts to strengthen the ministries of our Church.

Khouria Suzanne Murphy
Vice President of the North American Board and
North American Board Project Coordinator



The Orthodox Church was well-represented at the 44th annual March for Life in the nation’s capital on Friday, January 27, 2017. The theme of this year’s March was “The Power of One.”

Among those at the March were hierarchs and a large number of clergy, seminarians, and faithful. They witnessed to God’s gift of life and the need to speak out on behalf of the unborn.

On Thursday evening, February 26, a Vigil was held at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which was filled to capacity. In attendance were His Grace Bishop JOHN of Worcester for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, assisted by Fr. Nicholas Alford; OCA Metropolitan TIKHON; His Eminence Archbishop MELCHISEDEK; His Eminence Archbishop NATHANIEL; His Grace Bishop DIMITRIOS of the Greek Orthodox Me-



PHOTO CREDITS: Subdeacon Roman Ostash, Archpriest Gregory Safchuk

tropolis of Chicago; and Bishop MAXIM of the Serbian Church. Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Church also were present.

Metropolitan TIKHON observed that the March provided an opportunity to join with others – including the many young people present – to share a “message of hope for the world.” He also spoke of the cooperative efforts by the Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox and the Roman Catholics in “common witness,” and in “demonstrating a common understanding” of God’s gift of life.

After the pre-March program and speeches, Metropolitan TIKHON celebrated a Service of Prayer for the victims of abortion on the site of the pre-March program. There were over a hundred Orthodox, including hierarchs, clergy, seminarians and faculty members, and faithful at the service, who then marched together behind the iconic “Orthodox Christians for Life” banner.

Communities in Action

THE ICONOGRAPHY IN THE DOME OF ST. MARY CHURCH, HUNT VALLEY

The dome of an Orthodox Church is a hallmark of Byzantine architecture. It infuses the church with a more mystical dimension. “In a domed church, people are always conscious of the hovering hemisphere, which determines a vertical axis around which the subordinate spaces are grouped and invites symbolic identification with the ‘dome’ of heaven” (*Orthodox Art and Architecture*).



The dome at Saint Mary’s Church comes in four iconographic sections.

Jesus Christ the Pantokrator

This icon is found in the center of the dome, and it depicts the Lord,

the Almighty, who upholds the entire universe, looking down, blessing the creation and overseeing it. The Lord is surrounded by angelic hosts, who perform the heavenly Liturgy, chanting unceasingly: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are filled with Your Glory.” This is the same hymn that the Orthodox Church uses in the Liturgy.

Along with the angels, we see the four figures of the vision of Ezekiel (1:4–28) that deliver the heavenly Throne and Liturgy.

The Six-Winged Angels

Right below the Pantokrator are found the sixteen *Exapteriga* (six-winged angels) that the Orthodox Liturgy describes in the prayer of *Anaphora*. They symbolize how heaven and earth are joined together in endless liturgy and thanksgiving to the Lord, the Creator.

The Prophets of the Old Testament

In our dome there are sixteen prophets chosen from the Old Testament. They have been chosen according to their prophecy and the encounters they had with God. In

the Orthodox Bible and teaching, these prophets proclaimed the Word of God and foretold the incarnation and salvation of God with the coming of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul puts

it, they suffered all kinds of persecution; they lived a very tough and monastic life; they bore witness to the Word of God in all circumstances; and they hoped to see the salvation of Jesus Christ. “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrew 11:38–40). They are the link between the Old and New Testaments.

The Four Evangelists

The four corners of the dome show the four evangelists of the New Testament, those who saw and heard the Lord, and learned directly from Him. They wrote the Gospels and gave us the Word of God in the garment of the New Testament writings inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The iconography in the dome of our church shows us how all heaven and earth, prophets, evangelists, and angels, along with us worshiping today, are all worshiping together the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the One Lord Jesus Christ.

Fr. Damaskinos Issa, Pastor
St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church,
Hunt Valley, Maryland

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH GIVES FR. DUANE PEDERSON AWARD FOR PRISON MINISTRY

The St. George community in West St. Paul, Minnesota, led by our pastor, the V. Rev. Thomas Begley, always looks forward to the pastoral visit of His Grace Bishop ANTHONY. Throughout the past year, we made plans to honor our beloved Archimandrite, Duane Pederson, for



his twenty-five years as an Orthodox priest and over fifty years of ministry to prisoners and the poor. Having Sayidna ANTHONY with us to lead the celebration was an extra blessing, which warmed our hearts during a weekend of record-setting cold and blizzard conditions.

On Friday, December 16, we braved a snowstorm to have dinner with the Bishop, clergy and wives. We had three special guests, friends of Fr. Duane, who joined us: the Rev. Fr. Stephen Powley, and the V. Rev. John Kowalczyk and Mat. Kathy. It was an enjoyable evening of sharing stories and discussing theology. We were all enriched!

On Saturday, the Antiochian Women of St. George hosted a “Tea

with the Bishop” prior to Vespers. The women made delicious Lenten desserts. The whole parish was invited to a time of questions and answers with His Grace. He answered many questions and used the time to explain many teachings of our Church.

Vespers service was well-attended and served by the local and guest clergy. At the conclusion of the service, parishioners Tom and Mary Rudquist presented a stone from the very tomb of Christ to the Bishop, and also one to the parish of St. George. The tomb of Christ had been opened for only 24 hours, and God provided Tom and Mary the opportunity to visit. The stones gave off a pleasing scent of myrrh, such a



blessing for all who were present. In addition, small vials of water from Jacob’s Well in the Holy Land, with dissolved stones from the Tomb of Christ, were passed out to the families of those present.

Following Vespers, Sayidna ANTHONY and our pastor, V. Rev. Thomas Begley, had a quiet Lenten dinner with the Parish Council. There was an excellent exchange of ideas. His Grace also gave us insight into how he sees the Diocese working with our churches in the years to come.

Sunday morning was the coldest day of the year, with temperatures reaching 25 degrees below zero, accompanied by a fresh layer of beautiful snow to remind us of



the purity of the Nativity season. The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was well-attended and was a great blessing, with many clergy serving. The church was beautifully decorated in anticipation of the Feast of the Nativity. After the liturgy, a memorial service was held for two very dear members of St. George who fell asleep in the Lord one year ago: Archdeacon Russell Hodge and Jakob Kakish. May their memory be eternal! Sayidna ANTHONY also had the pleasure of inducting St. George parishioner Richard Constable into the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch as a Knight Commander.

The banquet honoring Fr. Duane

was very memorable! After the invocation by Bishop ANTHONY, we were treated to beautiful music and many fine speeches by several of our youth who have grown close to Fr. Duane during his years at St. George. Among the testimonials offered to Fr. Duane's many years of ministry were those by one of his adopted sons who is currently working with the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM); Fr. Richard Andrews, the spiritual advisor for the local OCPM; Fr. John Kowalczyk, secretary of the OCPM Board of Trustees; and Fr. Stephen Powley, Executive Director of the OCPM. A letter to Fr. Duane from Archbish-

op MARK (Orthodox Church in America), the Overseer of the Assembly of Bishops for the OCPM, was read.

The highlight of the day was the presentation of the Silver Order of St. Raphael of Brooklyn by Bishop ANTHONY on behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH. It was the desire of His Eminence to present the award in person. We sincerely thank him for allowing Sayidna ANTHONY to make the presentation to Fr. Duane in front of his many friends, family and colleagues in the prison ministry.

All present delighted in the kind and inspiring words of His Grace as he spoke of Fr. Duane's many years of ministry to forgotten souls. The wonderful celebration was made complete by Fr. Duane's short address expressing his gratitude to our beloved Archdiocese, and to all in attendance.

This was a weekend of many rich blessings for our parish and will be remembered by all of us for many years to come. As Fr. Duane loves to proclaim: "Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!"

V. Rev. Fr. Thomas Begley, and Paul Ablan,
Chairman of the Parish Council
St. George Orthodox Church,
W. St. Paul, Minnesota

BISHOP ANTHONY VISITS ST. MATTHEW CHURCH IN NORTH ROYALTON

From November 10 to 14, St. Matthew's Antiochian Orthodox Church in North Royalton, Ohio, was blessed to share in the teaching, preaching, leading, and fellowship of His Grace Bishop ANTHONY. Sayidna travels to our parish annually about this time of year to visit us and help celebrate St. Matthew's day. This year we were grateful to be able to spend nearly five days enjoy-

ing the sweet aroma that always accompanies godly counsel.

In previous years he has enlightened us with retreats on the subjects of the Holy Spirit, current issues facing our Church, and the Liturgical year. This year, members and visitors were treated to the endearing teaching style and scholarly wisdom that embodies Bishop ANTHONY as he conducted three sessions of teaching entitled *The Second Coming of Christ*. His Grace spoke about a wide variety of matters, from doctrine to living a Christ-centered life, baptism to death, eternity and the eternal now (to name just a few). We gained a greater understanding of liturgical worship and developed a deeper appreciation for our faith, enabling us to live more comfortably with the uncertainties of this present world. Thanks to Ancient Faith Radio, this inspired retreat can be viewed in its entirety at http://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/and_he_shall_come_again

The hierarchical weekend was capped off on Sunday evening, when His Grace presented us with a relic of St. Mary of Egypt! The whole Church celebrated this rare and exciting event with the Service of Little Compline with the Akathist to St. Mary of Egypt and St. Zosimus. This particular Saint is especially known and loved by our parish, as we honor her annually during our Lenten journey. Now, as Bishop ANTHONY commented during her presentation, this holy desert dweller has found a home with us. May this great blessing and joy be ever in our hearts and minds, and enhance the reality that we truly worship with the saints and celestial beings. By the shepherding of His grace and through the prayers of St. Mary of Egypt, may we emulate the holy quest of St. Zosimus.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF CULTURE AND FAITH

One hundred years is a significant milestone in the life of a church, one that deserves recognition through celebration. In October, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, located in the Acre section of Lowell, Massachusetts, will celebrate its hundred-year anniversary with a weekend of events organized by some of the sons, daughters and grandchildren of the founding elders.

For more than a century, the Acre has been Lowell's gateway to America for many immigrant and refugee families. As each wave of immigrants settled in the Acre, they transformed their small section into a place of cultural familiarity for their families. Large extended families lived together in two- or three-decker tenement houses; they opened ethnic food markets and they gathered together to perpetuate the celebrations which were part of their religious and cultural traditions.

The Irish were the first to make the Acre their home in 1822. They came to build the canals, factories and boardinghouses that transformed Lowell into a great industrial city. Shortly after, the Greeks settled in a section of the Acre known as "Greek Town" or the "Acre Acropolis." The men gathered nightly in the Greek coffee shops to drink coffee and discuss the politics of their homeland.

The first Syrian families settled in the Acre in the mid-1880s, originating from Aita El-Foukhar and Saydnaya. They brought with them their culture, their Orthodox religion and an eager desire to learn the language. Some worked in the mills, while most became peddlers, selling dry goods, clothing and household goods that they carried on their

backs and offered to area farmers. Sunday services were held in the homes of the faithful or the local YMCA, when a priest was available.

Between 1879 and 1883, a wave of French Canadian immigrants settled in the Acre and began to build a Protestant French presence in the neighborhood. The French Huguenots purchased the land at the corner of Fletcher and Bowers Streets and



erected the first French Protestant Church in Lowell. The church was eventually transformed by its pastor in 1885 into The French Protestant College for the purpose of educating young men and woman to become teachers, missionaries and pastors of the Protestant faith. The College struggled to survive on account of a lack of students and community support. Through a fundraising program and an offer to provide a building to house the college, it relocated to Springfield, Massachusetts, where it continues today as American International College.

In 1917, fewer than fifty Syrian

(continued on page 34)

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Serving Others Is To Serve God

JUDGES' CHOICE FOR THE ORATORICAL CONTEST IN THE DIOCESE OF MIAMI

To interpret properly the verse, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” from the Book of Joshua, we must first look

beyond these words and understand the teachings of the Book of Joshua. Prior to the story of Joshua, the Israelites had been led out of Egypt by Moses, as directed by God. This journey led the people across the sea and into the desert, where they wandered for forty years. God’s power prevailed in providing the people with water and food in this destitute place. More importantly, God provided the people with the pillar of their faith, the spiritual good that endures forever: the Law. In these five books, we hear of the betrayal by the Israelites in the desert, when they worshiped false gods. This generation, now consumed by their sin of betraying God, was destined to be renewed. A new generation that would lead the people to the Promised Land was born during these forty years: the children of those who were led out of Egypt. In this upcoming generation was a new leader, who above all else led this household to serve the Lord in all His words and deeds – Joshua. The Book of Joshua presents God as the only deliverer and Savior of His people, despite their sinfulness. No matter where the people traveled, God was there to watch over and provide for them. We find something similar in our everyday lives as Christians. God will always stand by our side, even when we are just as lost in our lives as the Israelites were in the desert.

Joshua, the man whose name means “God saves,” exemplified what it is to take up your household and serve



the Lord. Joshua served His purpose on earth by leading the new generation into the Promised Land. He abided in the words of God, and allowed God to do the saving. As St. John Chrysostom says, “He brought the people into the Promised Land, as Jesus does into heaven; not the Law; as neither did Moses bring them in, but remained without. The Law has not power to bring in to heaven, but grace has.” Joshua’s service to the Lord involved his sacrifice, foreshadowing that of Jesus Christ. In the same way that we must serve and sacrifice for God, God has sacrificed for

the salvation of humanity through the offering of His only begotten Son. Through this, we as the children of God, are forever indebted to Him and can only repay this through continuous obedience to the word of God, even to our own death.

Here is an example which represents what it means to serve others. A poor woman and her three children living in the slums of Southern India awaited the delivery of her community’s weekly supply of food. Each person had to make the trip to the outside village, and every person could only take one box of food each. The poor woman made her journey and was able to retrieve her box of food for herself and her children. This food was to last them the rest of the week. On her way back, she remembered that her neighbor had a sickness that made it impossible for her to walk. Knowing this, the poor woman divided the contents of the box of food in half, and gave half to her neighbor. The poor woman thought of others before thinking of herself. She and her house-

hold served others by sacrificing their food for them. She taught this meaning of service to her household, heaving the heart of a servant.

How many of us here today have ever been through a trial in our lives that we thought we could never overcome, but we did? These moments in our lives serve a purpose: to teach us lessons and ways to overcome our challenging situations, so that we can later use our experience to help others in similar situations. Each aspect of our lives can be taken into service for others. In order to come closer to God, we must come closer to our neighbors and serve them, whom we are asked to love by Christ. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:3).

We should humble ourselves, serve others as well as God and, in a world like today’s, spread kindness everywhere, over all else. We are given the Gospel not only to abide by, but to learn from. We learn to humble ourselves, just as Christ did when washing the feet of His disciples. Let us follow the light of Christ amongst ourselves, and be true to the life we must live in order to “serve the Lord.” Instead of singing songs that perpetuate hate or negativity, for example, why not use our talent to praise Him, who has given us the talent, the opportunity and the audience, to seek the ultimate service. Something as simple as volunteering at church, giving words of encouragement to those in need, or helping the less fortunate fulfill, in part, our purpose on earth. Fr. Thomas Hopko says, “We are all made to fulfill ourselves as creatures made in God’s image and likeness for eternal

life. And we can do so because God not only creates us with this possibility, and indeed, this command; but because He also does everything in His power to guarantee its accomplishment by sending His Son and His Spirit to the world.”

The reference of our “house” in the verse in Joshua is not only to our family, but those around us on whom we may have an impact, those we might serve. Leading others to serve God and abide by His will is what we are called for. Set an example of serving wholeheartedly. Lead others in the right direction spiritually and physically on earth. We serve God by allowing His will to express itself through us, when we surrender ourselves with an open heart to the Holy Spirit. We serve God when we use these talents to help others, and create a ripple effect of kindness.

Whenever the will of God is done, the law and the teachings are thereby transformed into service. God was, is, and always will be there for us to submit ourselves to Him. The essence of serving is the heart of a Christian’s life. Serving with kindness and with love, we make our hearts, which belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, His. This is what we are called to do: serve others, which in turn serves the Lord, as Joshua pledged to do with his household.

Nour Marie Soufia, age 18
St. George Cathedral, Coral Gables, Florida

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(continued from page 31)

men and women pooled their money and fulfilled their spiritual needs by purchasing the former home of the French Protestant College. For the next two years, alterations were made to the little granite and red-brick building, transforming it into one of the first Syrian Orthodox Churches in America. An altar screen of oak, the Iconostasis, was erected, and next to it hung a large Bavarian cut-glass chandelier. Over the years, the church ran into financial challenges; therefore priests and groups of men would go from house to house on Saturdays to collect nickels and dimes to help keep the church open. In May 1920, the City of Lowell granted a certificate of organization and a charter for “St. George Syrian Orthodox Church” was issued, and the church was recorded as a new corporation.

Over the years, the church has been remodeled and beautified through the installation of icons by the well-known iconographer, Constantine Youssis, whose work graces more

than fifty-five Orthodox churches in America. The most prominent of these icons are the image of the Holy Virgin in the apse and the icon of Jesus directly overhead. The historical and cultural transformation of the building now known as St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church reflects the same cultural transformations that have taken place within the Acre neighborhood, where the church is still located today.

Many of the descendants of the original founders and their families are parishioners who remain steadfast and loyal to the Orthodox faith. The transformation of the church has continued more recently through the inclusion of people from other cultures within the membership of the church. Jordanians, Egyptians, Greeks and Eritreans, as well as some Armenians and Palestinians, have chosen St. George as their spiritual home, along with several individuals and families who converted from other religious faiths.

All who attend the church are tied together by their Orthodox faith along and under the spiritual leadership of Rt. Reverend Father Leonard Faris. Known as Father Lenny by the church’s faithful, he is a man of compassion and deep religious conviction, one who has a knack for extending a warm and welcoming invitation to Christians of all traditions to come to St. George. Here they can experience the age-old religious rites and rituals of the Orthodox faith. “The role of the cler-

gy throughout the history of our church, which I take very seriously, is to be a spiritual Father who loves and embraces all his parishioners,” he said. “It is my role to guide them and teach them the holy Orthodox faith by my example. My wish is for all my spiritual sons and daughters to have a deep relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

In November, the parishioners of the church, which also included some of the children and grandchildren of the refugees that founded St. George, gathered household essentials in the basement for distribution to a new generation of Syrian refugees, as well as other refugees, looking for peace and a better quality of life. It was a true reflection of the commitment the founders of the church made to the Lowell community one hundred years ago.

The impetus for the hundred-year anniversary celebration of St. George lies within the faith and loyalty of the membership. Like the founders who have left the legacy of St. George to their descendants, the one hundred and thirty families who worship there today are hopeful that this celebration will inspire the next generation to perpetuate the rich culture and history and continue the spiritual journey of St. George for the next hundred years.

Additional information about the church’s hundred-year anniversary celebration can be found on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/saintgeorgelowell/>).



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2017 ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

“MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS.”

MARK 11:17






comments on this topic

The topic is from the Gospel of Mark, in which Jesus quotes both from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:8-11 speaking in terms of what is and is not to happen in God’s House – the temple – The Church. It begins with the statement that first and foremost it is a place of prayer – a place to worship the Living God and secondly it is for all nations – all people who choose to serve the Living God. Once one chooses to serve God and to follow His way – all who do so are welcomed. As the Scripture says, “For as Many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29). Paul further writes, “but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:9-1). Saint John Chrysostom in his homily on Galatians 3:27-29 clearly shares that no matter where we came from, anyone who has been baptized in Christ is no longer what he was by birth. He that was Greek, or Jew, or bond man yesterday, carries about with him the form, not of angel or archangel, but of the Lord of all, yes he displays in his own person the Christ” (Saint John Chrysostom Commentary on Galatians).

For more information and rules on the Oratorical and Bible Bowl Festival, visit www.antiochian.org/festivals

The Oratorical Festival is run by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Youth and Parish Ministries

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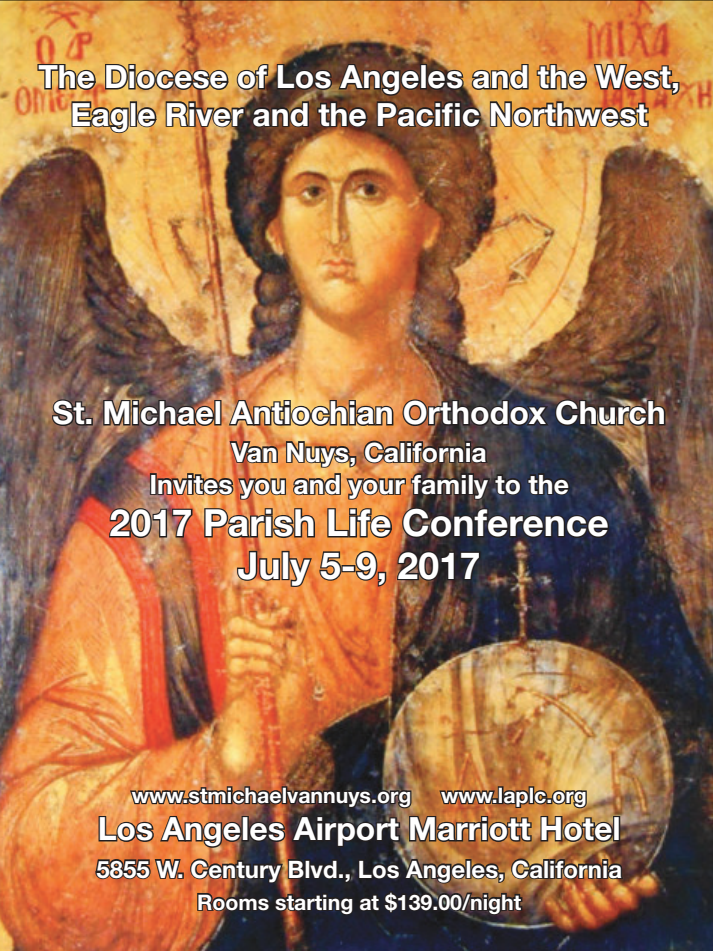


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