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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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THE PATRIARCHATE AND OUR ARCHDIOCESE ARE MOVING AHEAD

Bishop JOHN

This is the day the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24

The Antiochian Archdiocese of North America has now the responsibility of nominating three candidates to lead her into the future. This future is challenged by pluralism, globalization, political and financial instability at home and in the homelands of Antioch, delicate relationships and political tensions with other Orthodox jurisdictions in and outside of America, dwindling Church participation, as well as the needs of many banging at our doors, looking for the stability and truth of the ancient Church of Jesus Christ, and our commission by Christ to evangelize. We look to God for guidance and pray that He speaks to us through our Patriarch and Holy Synod, our clergy, our trustees, parish councils, parishioners and even our children.

Patriarch JOHN X invited our bishops and transition team to meet with him and a delegation from the Holy Synod of Antioch to tangibly demonstrate the love, concern, and support of all of the Antiochian Church for her Archdiocese in America. Almost a week was set aside from their busy schedules to meet with us, hear our needs and concerns, and better understand the history and relationship with all of the Churches within the Patriarchate. We were even shown a video of Patriarch IGNATIUS's message given at the consecration of Bishops JOHN, ANTHONY and NICHOLAS, in which Patriarch IGNATIUS calls the new bishops a "kind of chain between the Antiochians of America and the Antiochians

of the homeland." The Antiochian Patriarchate is united. This unity is made visible and is preserved in the persons of the bishops. Our metropolitan is a full member of the Holy Synod of Antioch. Our own "Pittsburgh" constitution attests to that unity and affirms the Holy Synod of Antioch as the highest authority in our Antiochian Church.

We met with the Patriarchal delegation on November 9 and 10. The meetings were open and frank. Many issues were discussed, and many misunderstandings were clarified and explained. The



delegation heard our descriptions of the American complexities and challenges. Because of globalization, we discovered that many of these same challenges were being wrestled with throughout the Patriarchate. The Patriarch, our Patriarchal Vicar Antonios, Metropolitan SABA and Metropolitan SILOUAN all showed great love and

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

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compassion. Our delegation felt supported, heard, valued, and loved. The Patriarch challenged us to come up with a strategic plan to help us be deliberate in our work for the future and asked us to update our constitution to reflect the current operation and work of the Archdiocese.

Metropolitan ANTONIOS arrived in North America on November 16, 2022, accompanied by our senior auxiliary bishop, Bishop THOMAS, and the Metropolitan's personal assistant, Fr. Propherios. The Metropolitan wasted no time and immediately met with the Archdiocese staff and began working. Within a couple of weeks, he had made over a dozen visitations, hearing the needs and concerns of the clergy and faithful of North America. Everywhere he has gone, he has preached the gospel message of love and called the hearers to become holy. He plans to visit all of the regions of the Archdiocese to help the Holy Synod select the most effective metropolitan for the needs of America.

On December 2 the Patriarchal Vicar met with our bishops and then the transition team to prepare for the December 3 Archdiocese Board Meeting. The spirit of these meetings was open and honest. We discussed the constitutional requirements and the needs of the Archdiocese.

On December 3 the Patriarchal Vicar met with the Board of Trustees. Sayidna ANTONIOS asked the Board to offer reflections on their understanding of what it means to be Antiochian. Antioch is understood as the church of the Apostles who began the missions to all the world. Antioch is where the disciples were first called Christians. The Antiochian theological school offered the theological emphasis on Incarnation, and the balance of the humanity and divinity of Christ. It is the church in the land that Christ and the Apostles walked, and whose ground is rich with martyrs blood and the tears of ascetics. It is multi-national and multi-cultural, located in the center of all ancient trade routes. It is also a place where Christians lived peacefully for generations with other faith groups. The trustees expressed great satisfaction with the benefits of the exercise.

Metropolitan ANTONIOS presented the eligible candidates, who, according to our "Pittsburgh" constitution, need to come from the list of names of nominees kept in the records of the Patriarchate and Holy Synod. It is the duty of every metropolitan of the Patriarchate to submit annually the qualified episcopal candidates from each diocese. The candidates were submitted to the Board of Trustees. The Board will gather biographies of each of these candidates and send them to each of the parishes, with the call for the Nominating Election to be held in Dallas in January.

Each parish will receive one vote for every 100 members of their parishes. Additionally, each bishop, pastor, full-time assistant pastor, retired pastors, military chaplains and all full-time clergy directly employed by the Archdiocese shall be delegates with one vote. In addition, all regular members of the Board of Trustees, and each diocesan organization shall have one vote. The three candidates who have the most votes will have their names sent to the Holy Synod for them to consider for election as our metropolitan.

May God bless and guide all of our delegates and our Holy Synod to reveal whom God wants to lead us and serve us.

WHAT MAKES AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

Orthodox?

Fr. Michael Massouh

SOON AFTER I WAS ORDAINED AS A PRIEST AND ASSIGNED TO ANTIOCHIAN VIL-
LAGE, TWO YOUNG MEN AT A CONFERENCE ASKED ME A QUESTION: "WHAT MAKES
AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX?" THIS IS LIKE ASKING WHAT MAKES A REM-
BRANDT A REMBRANDT? OR A PICASSO A PICASSO, OR A BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY A
BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY, OR A NORMAN ROCKWELL A NORMAN ROCKWELL.

At the start of my priesthood, I came up with some answers: We use icons to help us in worship and prayer. We have them in our churches, in our homes, in our cars, near our work space, and in our wallets and purses. We make the sign of the cross differently than our Roman brothers and sisters, and others who sign themselves. Our priests can marry. We use incense, have processions in our churches, and on high holidays we process around the exterior of the church. We often celebrate Pascha [Easter] on different Sundays than our Western brothers and sisters, and some of us celebrate Christmas on January 7. We fast twice each week and for proscribed forty-day fasts during the year.

All of this is true, but does it get to the heart

of the matter? I have pondered this question over the years. Recently, after helping to serve Liturgy at St. George in Akron the deacon informed me that there was someone who wanted to see me. When I went out on the *soleas* I recognized the man but could not recall his name, or where it was we met. He gave me his name and then it all came back. He was one of the two men who had asked me that question years ago.

In instructing people who wanted to become Orthodox and in reading western religious literature, I now have a firmer grasp of the question and believe I have a fuller answer. I told him what I now knew and this prompted me to write this article.

A major characteristic of Orthodoxy Christianity is



that by His grace, we have kept the mystery of God alive. He is beyond our mortal grasp, our full understanding. We recognize that if we knew God completely, we would be God and have no need of Him.

According to Webster's Dictionary a mystery is "something unexplained, unknown." This thought is expressed in both St. John Chrysostom's and St. Basil's *Anaphoras* – the high point of the Liturgy. St. John articulates it with these words: "For thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same, thou and thine Only-begotten Son and Holy Spirit." St. Basil expresses it so: "O Master of all, Lord of heaven and earth and of all creation both visible and invisible; who sittest upon the throne of glory and beholdest the depths: who art without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, immutable."

Our understanding of God comes from our Hebrew ancestors. They were so reverent about Him that they would not even pronounce His name when they came across it in Scripture. They simply paused at the tetragram, YHWH, and went on. Jesus Christ reinforces the reverence of God when He instructs us in the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Your name is holy, it is to be respected; and as the Third Commandment warns: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

This understanding of the mystery of God is recorded in the Old Testament. God speaks to Isaiah at one point and says "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" (Isaiah 55:8–9), meaning that you will not know them; you are mortal and limited in knowing all things. God makes the same point with Job when He chastises him by saying, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you can" (Job 38:4). Can the clay say to the potter how to fashion him? (Isaiah 45:9, Romans 9:21).

God is wholly other. He is uncreated and

immortal and one essence. We are created, we are mortal, and are composed of some other essence. What is *essence*? Another word for essence is *nature*, or *stuff*. A central dogma of the Orthodox faith is our understanding of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The one Godhead is one uncreated substance, or nature, or essence. Everything else is created and made of some other nature or essence.

Christ has both a human and a divine nature. We have a human nature only; animals have another nature, and so on. In the Creed we make that point: We believe ". . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made."

God's essence is unknowable, but He does reveal Himself to us. So, it is not as if we don't know God; we just won't know Him completely. But, we can "know" Him and commune in the communion of the Holy Trinity inasmuch as we participate in the Body of Christ. St. Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century abbot, articulated what was known and understood from the time of Christ when he described the distinction between God's essence and His energies. God's essence is beyond our human knowledge. Yet, we know Him through His works, His energies. In the evening vespersal Psalm (104)

we are reminded of God's creative work: the mountains, the valleys, the rivers and seas, the moon and the sun, the animals, we humans, and we conclude, "The glory of the Lord shall endure forever; the Lord shall rejoice in his works. . . . O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom thou hast made them all." Another Psalm speaks to this truth: "The heavens declare the glory of God" (19:1).

We Orthodox have no problem not knowing everything. Included in the *Anaphora* is the phrase: "For all things we give thanks unto thee, and to thine



Only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit; for all things of which we know, and of which we know not.” Our Western brothers and sisters – both Roman Catholic and Protestant – tend to want answers to all questions, and if there is no ready answer the question is set aside or doubted (for example, the Virgin birth). Sometimes there is an attempt to explain a miracle away by providing a natural explanation. So the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish by Jesus is claimed to involve an exaggeration of the number He fed. Again, His walking on the water must have been because there were well-placed stones on which He crossed the sea.

Our Western brothers and sisters also tend to organize and to analyze all facets of the faith delivered to the Apostles. For example, some sins are minor – “venial” – while other sins are major – “mortal” – and there is a punishment for each one, an appropriate penance. For Roman Catholics a sin is breaking a law, and an appropriate punishment is required. For the Orthodox, a sin is *missing the mark*; which is the meaning of the Greek word for sin (*hamartia*). Just as an archer sends an arrow toward the target and misses the bullseye, so we miss the mark of not doing what we should have done. A sin – missing the mark – is therefore part of being human in a fallen world; we do not always do the things we should. St. Paul – perhaps the epitome of a true Christian – makes this point vividly when he tells the Romans, “For what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15). When an Orthodox confesses his misdeeds and shortcomings to a priest, the priest helps the person to ask God for forgiveness and for Christ’s help, and to try to do better next time. Confession is not a legal procedure, but a reconciliation.

Another example of our differences with Western Christians is the quantifying of the sacraments. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin *sacra-re* meaning to hallow; and that is a translation of the Greek word *musterion*, meaning mystery. Some Protestant hold that there is one sacrament, others hold that there are three, and Roman Catholics that there are seven. We Orthodox imitated our Roman brothers and list seven in some prayer books. A sacrament, however, is when God’s grace is experienced in someone’s life. Usually this takes place in established sacred rites like baptism, marriage, and the eucharist, but it is also there in personal encounters, such as healings and insights. For Orthodox, God’s

grace cannot be limited to one, or three, or seven contexts.

Since the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Roman church became infatuated with rational, philosophical, and naturalistic approaches to the faith handed down from Christ and the Apostles. Aquinas took the works of Aristotle recently translated from the Greek and Arabic into Latin, and sought to use Aristotelian concepts to explain elements of the faith, such as the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Moreover, while he did not exactly try to prove the existence of the one God, this was the way he was often understood. He came up with five ways: motion, causation, efficient cause, contingency, and final cause. All five ways have been challenged, es-



pecially in the modern era.

Aquinas himself was not far from the Orthodox acknowledgment of mystery: so, for example, he held that “we are unable to apprehend (the divine substance) by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.14).¹ This is a form of the *via negativa*, or “negative way,” with which Orthodox theologians are familiar. As is often the case, however, students of Aquinas pushed the rationalist approach further, and read him as starting with the natural world to prove the existence of God (natural theology). For Orthodox the starting point is that God exists – it is the first postulate, the first axiom. When asked His name, He says “I Am.” Like Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*, the starting point to his “geometry” are several *givens*, called postulates

or axioms, that are not rationally demonstrable, but are accepted as true.

We Orthodox begin with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That is our starting point. Our Roman Catholic friends continue to put great stock in a naturalistic or philosophical understanding of Christianity. Before he died, Pope John Paul II published *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, in which he uses philosophy to articulate the Christian faith. In 1998 he issued an Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), making the same point about how important philosophy is to understanding the Christian faith.

The early Church Fathers – both Western and Eastern – knew Plato and Aristotle and the other Greek philosophers, but they did not subordinate their thought to them. They borrowed concepts and names to articulate the faith, and one could say that they "baptized"

them, but did not become enamored of them. For the early Christian Fathers – both Western and Eastern – **Christ was the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and end – of the Christian faith** (Revelation 1:8; 22:13).

In a similar way, the Orthodox have a compassionate, pastoral approach to human suffering, pain, and misdeeds. Sinners (and we are all sinners, missing the mark by not thinking and living the life Christ expects of us) are to be reconciled to the Church, the Body of Christ. Recognizing that **each person possesses the divine spark that has become tarnished through ignorance, and has wandered astray, and needs to be cleansed, we appeal to that sinner to repent, to change his way of life (*metanoia*), to ask God for forgiveness, and to be set aright on the road to the Kingdom.**

So, what makes an Orthodox Christian Orthodox?

- an acceptance of the mystery of God;
- a compassionate approach to human suffering, pain, and misdeeds;
- a recognition that each person, however degraded, or hopeless, possesses a spark of the divine that needs cultivating and nurturing.

Now, the Orthodox are not anti-reason. After all, we were endowed with a brain to think, to analyze, to organize, and to reason, and in many fac-

ets of life one uses all four capacities. Yet there are some things beyond reason: love, for instance. There is little reason to explain why two people fall in love and stay in love for a lifetime and become one flesh. Also, how do you explain the sense of awe we occasionally experience, or the Virgin Birth, or Christ's healing of the man born blind, or of the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ? St. Peter merely said, "We were eyewitnesses to His majesty." We don't know how He was transfigured, or rose from the dead. We simply saw what He did.

Reason is important and necessary for human survival, but it cannot answer all questions. Under-

standing the role mystery plays in our faith in God is critical in drawing close to God, as we strive and struggle to understand. Where there is no inner life of struggle to be formed in the image of God, outward forms fill the void. The Roman Catholics have tended to create intricate legal and rational structures, institutions, functions, and a papal magisterium. Protestants have creeds, doctrinal formulae, the biblical text divorced from a living tradition, and scriptural commentary. Both tend to reduce life to concepts, and concepts that tend to create idols.

Orthodox life cannot be stuffed into the narrow coffin of legal or rational systems. This resistance to one-size-fits-all is a "proof" of Orthodoxy's vitality and vigor.

1. As the Wikipedia article on Aquinas's "Five Ways" notes, they are attempts "to demonstrate what we call God, which is a subtly different thing" from a rationalistic *proof* ("Five Ways," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ways_\(Aquinas\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ways_(Aquinas))).

Christ was the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and end of the Christian faith

- An acceptance of the mystery of God;
- A compassionate approach to human suffering, pain, and misdeeds;
- A recognition that each person, however degraded, or hopeless, possesses a spark of the divine that needs cultivating and nurturing.

“AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH”

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

Bishop THOMAS (Joseph), Fr. Joseph Hazar, and Fr. David Hyatt

“Have you not read,” Jesus said, “that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4–6).



Marriage is a mystery, a sacrament, a uniting of one man and one woman into a living icon of the Holy Trinity, a manifestation of the love of Christ for His Church, and the Church for her Lord, the foundation for the family and the generative force for bearing children, and it is the context for working out the salvation of both husband and wife through self-sacrificing love.

In our secular society, however, many think of marriage as a contract between two consenting adults based on the fulfillment of each other's needs. The desire “to live happily ever after” has become the fan-fanful basis for marriage, and also the great downfall of so many romantic beginnings. This self-orientation, of “meeting my needs,” is evident even in the way

many go about planning their wedding ceremonies. Many little girls dream of having a fairytale wedding – whatever that may look like in their mind. Some dream of getting married in a cathedral, dressed like a princess. Others imagine a beach, surrounded by only a few of their family and friends. Some opt to have no one there, but to simply elope with the man of their dreams. No matter what their version of the fairytale looks like, the wedding is “their special day.”

Over the years, we have either heard of requests from other clergy, or else received many requests ourselves, to alter the wedding service by adding to, subtracting from, or substituting something for traditional Orthodox wedding practices: everything from walking down the aisle to pop music, to changing

the Epistle reading, to adding a unity candle or vows to the service, to having girls stand with the grooms-men because she is the groom's best friend, to having the family pet serve as the ring-bearer. The list goes on and on.¹

MARRIAGE IS A SACRAMENT

To understand why the Church has the traditions that it does, we should grasp what a wedding is. A wedding is a mystery (sacrament), in which God takes a man and woman, who have already promised themselves to each other, and blesses their union, making them one flesh. "In marriage man does not only satisfy the needs of his earthly, secular existence, but also realizes something very important of the purpose for which he was created; that is, he enters the realm of eternal life."

The marriage service gives the couple grace to endure the hardships of life. It blesses the man and woman to consummate their relationship and to bring children into the world. It changes the role of the bridal pair with their parents, still teaching them to honor and love them, but also instructing the "man [to] leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." (The same is implied for the wife). They are no longer under obedience to their parents, nor are they directed by them, but they become an independent unit, walking together with the Lord.

Because marriage is a sacrament of the Church given to us by God, it is important that we come to the marriage service willing to *submit* and *receive*, rather than with our list of needs and wants. St. Ignatius (c. 105) writes, "It is becoming, therefore, to men and women who marry, that they marry with the counsel of the bishop, that the marriage may be in our Lord, and not in lust. Let everything, therefore, be [done] for the honour of God."²

MARRIAGE AS AN ICON OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Marriage is also a living icon of the Holy Trinity, in which the "mystery of unity in diversity applies not only to the doctrine of the Church but to the doctrine of marriage."³ In the creation narrative in Genesis, God says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." From the beginning, the uniting of the differences of man and



woman was intended to be an image or icon of the life of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together, as husband and wife, they were given *dominion* to rule as representatives of God, with the goodness of the differences united in love.

We know from our Lord and from the Church Fathers that ego (self-love) is the opposite of true love. Ego is the rejecting of love, and when it interferes with the sacrament of marriage offered by the Church, it prevents the love that Christ has for us from reaching us on that day when we are supposed to be receiving His blessing to live together as one for the rest of our lives – reflecting the life of the Holy Trinity. Bishop JOHN (Abdalah) writes, "We are not self-sufficient; rather, we are made to be in relationships. These relationships need God's love to envelop us communally, which is accomplished through Christ by the Holy Spirit."⁴

It is true that we are all individuals and different, and that there are times to celebrate our individuality. The marriage service, however, is a time to embrace the solidarity of our humanity. Laws are created and enforced equally on all people, because no one is better than anyone else. To individualize our wedding service is to say that we are different from all other people; this is heresy and reflects our own ego, rather than reflecting the selfless love of the Holy Trinity.

MARRIAGE AS A PICTURE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

In the service of marriage or crowning, the epistle reading is always from Ephesians 5:20–33. St. Paul describes the way that a husband and wife should

live together, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Their relationship is counter-cultural to the self-oriented way many couples live out their marriages today. St. Paul calls for wives to “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” and husbands to “love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” Submission, giving up one’s own right or will, is not a popular concept, but it is necessary if we are to live in Christ, wives giving up their own “rights” to their husbands, and husbands laying down their own lives for their wives. Fr. Thomas Hopko writes, “The husband must love his wife to the point of death, as Christ loves the Church. And the wife must be totally given to her husband in everything as the Church is given to Christ. The union in love must be perfect, total, complete, enduring and lasting forever.”⁵ Can you imagine a more beautiful way of life – a life that is a picture of Christ’s love for his Church, and the Church’s self-giving submission to her Groom?

Consequently, a couple needs to engage in the preparation process for marriage with all seriousness and self-examination. The joy that flows from the union of husband and wife should be a godly joy, rather than a carnal celebration. Rather than spending excessive amounts of time tasting cakes, taking engagement photos, and selecting a playlist for the DJ to play at the reception, a couple will be better prepared for a godly marriage by seriously engaging in premarriage counseling, contemplation of the prayers and readings from Holy Scripture, and examining their own motivations in their coming marriage. Is it the bride’s desire to give herself over fully to her husband? Is it the groom’s purpose to lay his life down fully for his wife?

St. John Chrysostom writes, “When harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result.... When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned

upside-down.... If we order our lives in this way and diligently study the Scriptures, we will find lessons to guide us in everything we need!”⁶ To the extent that this is lived out in the Church, their marriage will be a picture of Christ and the Church.

MARRIAGE AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAMILY

Marriage is also the foundational relationship for the building of a family, as a little church, and for the procreation of children. Not only were Adam and Eve given the responsibility to have dominion over creation as icons of the Holy Trinity, but they were also given the charge to “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28).

In the Service of Marriage or Crowning, the priest prays, “Grant them of the fruit of their bodies, fair children, concord of soul and body.... Give them seed in number like unto the full ears of grain.... And let them behold their children’s children, like a newly-planted olive orchard, round about their table.”⁷ The grace of God poured out in the sacrament of marriage in the Church provides the foundation for a new family to be formed between the man and woman – leaving father and mother cleaving to one another in this new one-flesh union. Typically, the fruit of their union is the blessing of children and the growth of the family. The Church fathers condemned the use of contraception in all forms, although there was a difference in approach, as a rejection of God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. The sexual union between husband and wife is to be approached with an openness to the blessing of children, even as it is also an aid to “quench the fiery passions of our nature.”⁸

As in all aspects of the married life, self-sacrificing love is to be the guiding rule of the family – between husband and wife, and parents with their children. St. Paul writes, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” And children also are instructed to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”⁹ This mutual life together in Christ constitutes a “little Church.” St. John Chrysostom writes, “Indeed, the household is a little Church. Therefore, it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives.”¹⁰

Pastors understand that many marriages in our churches these days are mixed marriages, meaning an Orthodox is marrying a heterodox. Let us remember



1. John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), p. 19.
2. St. Ignatius, *Epistle to Polycarp*, V (ANF, 1.100).
3. Met. Kallistos (Ware), *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 294.
4. Bp. JOHN Abdallah and Nicholas G. Mamey, *Building An Orthodox Marriage* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), p. 13.
5. Fr. Thomas Hopko, "Sexuality, Marriage and Family" (*The Orthodox Faith*, Vol. 4), p. 152.
6. St. John Chrysostom, "Homily 20: On Ephesians 5:22-33," in *St. John Chrysostom - On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991).
7. Isabel Florence Hapgood, ed., *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church* (Englewood: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 1996), p. 296.
8. St. John Chrysostom, "On Virginity," 19.2-3.
9. Ephesians 6:1-4.
10. St. John Chrysostom, "Homily 20: On Ephesians 5:22-33," *op. cit.*, p. 57.
11. John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
12. St. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Matthew II" (NPNF 1.10, p. 74, as translated by Fr. Josiah Trenham in *Marriage and Virginity According to St. John Chrysostom*, p. 202).
13. Tertullian, "To His Wife" (*Marriage in the Early Church*), pp. 38-39.

that Orthodox means "true believing," and our traditions – regardless of whether we fully understand them – must be maintained. Because of the difference between the Orthodox approach to family and the blessing of children, and the heterodox Christian traditions, it is especially important for couples to submit themselves to the wisdom of the Church through the bishop and priests as they are preparing for marriage. One way that a humility of heart is demonstrated is in their willingness to accept the traditional Orthodox wedding service. If a bride and groom are not willing to trust the Church to instruct them about how to be married, we should question why the bridal pair desire to get married in the Orthodox Church at all. This is a good indicator of what their faith will look like within the married couple's life, especially in the raising of children.

MARRIAGE AS A PATH OF SALVATION

Finally, marriage is a pathway for salvation for the husband and wife as they receive and bear the crowns of joy and martyrdom given to them in the marriage service. This is not intended to be a morbid prediction of suffering in marriage, but instead a call to lay down one's life in order to participate with Christ in his victorious death and resurrection. This is "the central frame of reference which is making marriage a Christian marriage."¹¹

The Church is in the business (for lack of a better word) of sanctification and salvation. All aspects of our lives, including marriage and the family, are for our salvation. St. John Chrysostom writes, "Let your home be a sort of arena, a stadium of exercise for virtue, that having trained yourself well there, you may with entire skill encounter all abroad."¹² As a couple lives together in this way, with the children that God gives them as the fruit of their loving union, they will be martyrs (witnesses) to the presence of Christ in their home, even as they encounter the society in which they live.

This approach to marriage and the family is formed even in the process of planning for the wedding. As a couple lays aside their preferences in order to receive from the Church the sacrament of marriage, they will already be living as witnesses of the submission and self-sacrificing love that is necessary for a family to flourish in Christ. There are certain customs that may creep into our churches, such as having a young girl throw flowers, while a young boy walks (usually fake) rings down the aisle, but these

changes do not really affect the wedding service, and so they are accepted by many priests; some, however, may not allow anything to distract from the true purpose of the wedding: the sanctification and purification of the bride and groom to live as one with each other in Christ.

We would like to leave you with a beautiful description of an Orthodox Christian marriage by the ancient Christian apologist, Tertullian. He writes,

What words can describe the happiness of that marriage which the church unites, the offering strengthens, the blessing seals, the angels proclaim, and the Father declares valid? For even on earth children do not rightly and lawfully wed without their fathers' consent. What a bond is this: two believers who share one hope, one desire, one discipline, the same service! Two are brother and sister, fellow servants. There is no distinction of spirit or flesh, but truly they are two in one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Mark 10:8). Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, together they fast, teaching each other, exhorting each other, supporting each other.

Side by side in the church of God and at the banquet of God, side by side in difficulties, in times of persecution, and in times of consolation. Neither hides anything from the other, neither shuns the other, neither is a burden to the other. They freely visit the sick and sustain the needy. They give alms without anxiety, attend the sacrifice without scruple, perform their daily duties unobstructed. They do not have to hide the sign of the cross, or be afraid of greeting their fellow Christians, or give blessings in silence. They sing psalms and hymns to one another and strive to outdo each other in chanting to the Lord. Seeing and hearing this, Christ rejoices. He gives them his peace. Where there are two, he also is present [cf. Matt. 18:20]; and where he is, there is no evil.¹³



FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING FIRST

Fr. John Oliver

READERS OF *THE WORD* KNOW OF CARDINAL VIRTUES, SUCH AS HUMILITY, KINDNESS, PATIENCE, DILIGENCE ... AND THE UNAPOLOGETIC PURSUIT OF BEING FIRST. YES, YOU READ THAT RIGHT. A CHARMING VIDEO NOW MAKING THE ROUNDS. FIVE MINUTES LONG, THE WHOLE THING TAKES PLACE INSIDE THE ELEVATOR OF SOME LARGE BUSINESS BUILDING. THE DOORS OPEN AS ONE MAN – LATE-20S, HANDSOME, FIT, WELL PUT-TOGETHER, CARRYING AN OVER-THE-SHOULDER BRIEFCASE – STEPS INSIDE, WITH SOFT ELEVATOR MUSIC PLAYING AS HE LEANS FORWARD AND PUSHES THE BUTTON FOR FLOOR 19.

Just before the elevator doors are about to close, a young woman – attractive, pleasant, wearing a business-casual ensemble with a nice overcoat – steps on. The young woman and the guy barely make eye contact. She steps forward to the panel and pushes the button for floor 22. They fidget a bit as two strangers in one elevator often do. Doors close and up they begin to go up.

When the eighth chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke opens, our Lord Jesus is also on the move. The entire fifty-six verses of that chapter are full of action, with Christ traveling from village to village, town to town, spreading the Good News about the kingdom of God with its promise of new hope, new outlook, new life. He travels on foot with His twelve apostles, as well as with some faithful women, Mary Magdalene and others, striding from town to town.

At first, both faces look up at the number board above the elevator doors. As the elevator begins to rise, a caption appears for what the man is beginning

to think: "Have I seen her before?" A moment later, he thinks, "Kinda looks like my mom. Freud-alert." The camera then turns to the young woman and a caption appears of what she is thinking: "He's cute. Smells kinda sweaty, but in a good way." Then, back to him. "But my mother was kind of beautiful at that age, I think." Up the elevator goes, in silence — floor number 6, number 7, number 8.

Jesus and His followers bump into a large crowd who had been expecting them. Jairus, leader of the local Jewish house of worship, elbows through the crowd and, in what will become an important detail, comes to Jesus. He falls at the feet of Christ and does what a worried parent does: he pleads for the healing of his child. "Please, come to my house, I have a twelve-year-old daughter, and she is dying." This

pedestrian traffic jam, however, is taking a while to get through.

Floor number 7, number 8, number 9. The young woman notices that the young man has pushed the button for floor 19. "That's the architectural firm," she thinks to herself. "He's creative." Then, back to him: "Why don't I just



say something?" he thinks to himself. Both look down at the floor. "Or, is that where the accounting firm is?" she wonders. "He must be good with money. My dad would love him." Floor numbers 14, 15, 16.

Just as Jesus is ambling through the traffic jam, a woman suffering a hemorrhage of blood for twelve years elbows her way through the crowd and, in what will become an important detail, comes to Jesus. She falls at the feet of Christ and does what a suffering woman does: she reaches for help. Pinching the fabric of His hem is enough, for the power of His divinity that resides even in His physical flesh and blood flows from Him and into the body of the sick patient. Immediately, that power stops the flow of blood and the woman is healed.



Floors 15, 16, 17. Just when it looks like one of them will summon the ocean of courage necessary to start a conversation, we hear the ding of the elevator. The doors open onto floor 19, and the man nervously walks out of the elevator. So many thoughts but not a single word spoken between them. As the doors close and the young woman waits for floor 22, what is going through her head appears at the bottom of the screen: "Perfect. He didn't notice me at all." The next time we see the elevator, a small crowd huddles inside. Our young woman is on one side, our young man on the

other. Though a dozen people separate them, and all are riding in silence, they sure notice each other. A caption appears beneath the young man, "Well, would you look at that." Then, a caption beneath the young woman, "Two days in a row."

We don't know what Jairus is thinking, but we do know what he is feeling. It's hard to start a conversation with a stranger, especially this One at the center of the crowd, but his daughter's life is on the line. So he gives a voice to his need, and reaches out to Christ. We don't know what the sick woman is thinking, but we do know what she is feeling. It's hard to get the attention of a stranger, especially this One at the center of all this hustle, but her future is on the line. So, she gives a hand to her need and reaches out to Christ.

As the last scene in the elevator unfolds, only our

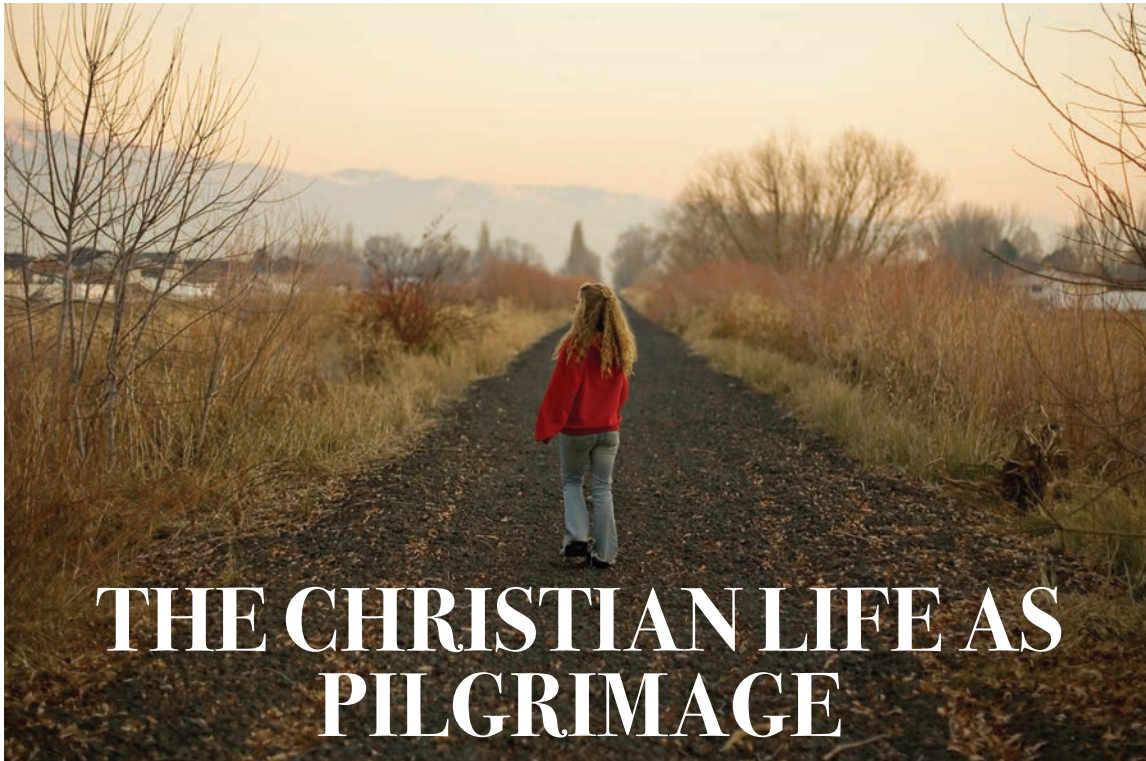
young woman is onboard. Down she goes from floor 22 to floor 21 to floor 20. This time, she's holding a cardboard box of personal belongings, the kind one carries when leaving a job. Files, a book, a small plant; her face is sad. We hear a ding. Onto the elevator walks our guy, who tunes into the moment immediately. A caption appears beneath him, "Was she fired?" Then, beneath her, "This is it. I could tell him I just got fired." Their eyes glance in the others' direction. Floor 11, floor 10, floor 9.

The camera moves in as the captions come fast now. "Wouldn't it be romantic?" he wonders. "On the day I got fired..." she thinks. "She met the love of her life," he smiles to himself. "It would be perfect," she smiles to herself. Music swells as the camera leans in. Floor 8, floor 7, floor 6. "We could get married," he thinks. "This summer," she thinks. "We would always laugh," he smiles to himself. "At why we didn't just say, 'Hi,' she smiles to herself. And just as they're about to raise their faces toward each other in one life-changing moment, we hear a ding. The music stops, the doors open, and the woman slowly walks off, turning to the right; the man slowly walks off, turning to the left. Both lonely, both desperately wanting a connection, both too shy to speak a word. Off they go, back to their lives, in silence.

We've just met two hurting souls, too afraid to reach out; we've also met another two hurting souls, too afraid not to. Our elevator couple, whose names we do not know, shared a silent but intense need for connection, but neither could summon the courage to take a risk. Our Gospel couple, Jairus and the ailing woman, shared a mutual and intense need for healing, and both did summon the courage to take a risk.

We know about cardinal virtues such as humility, kindness, patience, diligence. But is there ever a time for an unapologetic pursuit of being first? Yes, when vital connection and deep healing are on the line. We place that need first, before comfort, before routine, before ego, before any lingering lethal belief that we are just supposed to remain isolated and sick. We're first to reach out, to initiate a conversation, to make a connection, to be a Jairus who speaks up, to be a needful woman who reaches out.

What do we discover? That the need we thought was so humiliatingly unique is, in fact, shared by all. Now imagine not an elevator, but a fellowship hall, or even a home, full of people with tiny captions beneath their feet, all holding the exact same words: "I am lonely; I wish someone would talk to me."



William W. Weber

THE AUTHOR OF THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. POLYCARP, WRITING IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND CENTURY, BEGAN HIS WORK AS FOLLOWS:

“THE CHURCH OF GOD SOJOURNING AT SMYRNA TO THE CHURCH OF GOD SOJOURNING AT PHILOMELIUM AND TO ALL THE COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY AND CATHOLIC CHURCH SOJOURNING IN EVERY PLACE: MAY MERCY, PEACE, AND LOVE BE MULTIPLIED FROM GOD THE FATHER AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

Brothers and sisters, we are sojourners together on a pilgrimage. As sojourners, we are strangers travelling in a foreign land, without holding citizenship there. As pilgrims, we are aliens visiting for a short while in another’s land. We have embarked upon a great pilgrimage to our true homeland, God’s Heaven, where our citizenship lies (Philippians 3:20).

The Bible speaks of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – as sojourners and pilgrims (see, for example, Genesis 12:10, 35:27, and 47:9). St. Paul comments about this as follows:

By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were joint-

heirs of the same promise, for he was looking for the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and embraced them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:9–10, 13).

The city he speaks of is the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1–2). Until we get there, everywhere we walk in this world lacks a proper foundation, but is merely shifting sand, as it literally was for the patriarchs in the desert.

In the Law of Moses, God commanded the Israelites to make three annual pilgrimages to the

place of sacrifice, His Mercy Seat, where He dwelt among His people. They travelled for the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Once the Temple was built, their journey was to the earthly Jerusalem. As they climbed upwards to Mount Zion, they would sing the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 119–133) that we sing in Great Lent during the Presanctified Liturgy. At the top they would meet their God in sacrifice and praise. So also would Moses and Elijah in their personal pilgrimages to face God on holy mountains.

These Old Testament patterns continue in the Church. The faithful make pilgrimages to all manner of holy places, but especially to Jerusalem. There our Lord made His supreme sacrifice on the Cross, journeyed to Hades to free the dead, and rose victorious on the third day. The Church provides us with liturgical pilgrimages to bring the Spirit to our earthly sojourn. Every week our worship starts with “Blessed is the Kingdom” The end of our pilgrimage is the Blessed Kingdom itself. So every week we move from the first day, the Day of Resurrection, to the next Sunday, the Eighth Day, which is a symbol of the Eternal Kingdom.

On September 1, we start a new church year. And on September 8, the eighth day, we celebrate the Nativity of the Theotokos, which is the beginning of our salvation. Then comes the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross (September 14), without which there is no journey. In the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (November 21), we celebrate her pilgrimage to the Holy of Holies to meet God and prepare to become the Mother of God. Afterwards comes the Nativity of our Lord (December 25). The Holy Theotokos and Joseph the Betrothed take a pilgrimage to their ancestral home in Bethlehem. There Christ is born and begins His pilgrimage on earth. To get to the newborn King, the Wise Men make their pilgrimage. Because of the murderous wrath of Herod, the Holy Family makes another journey, going from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then back to Nazareth. After Christ’s Nativity comes His Baptism and the Theophany of the Holy Trinity (January 6), which is the heart and goal of our pilgrimage. Christ’s journey continues with His Presentation in the Temple (February 2). Then we take a step back to celebrate His Annunciation and becoming man in the womb of the

Virgin Mary (March 25), where His pilgrimage from Heaven to earth began. On Palm Sunday we begin to see where our pilgrimage will take us in this world: the reaction of self-love swiftly shifting hellward. Then at Pascha, however, Life triumphs over death, and His victorious pilgrimage opens the path of pilgrimage to us. Christ’s earthly pilgrimage is completed in His Ascension. Then He sends down the Spirit at Pentecost to equip us for our own pilgrimage. Finally, we celebrate His Transfiguration (August 6) and our Lady’s Dormition (August 15), both figures of our pilgrimage from earthly death to divine transformation. All these feasts are communal – in common, experienced together in our shared pilgrimage.

While this pilgrimage of ours is one of joy, let us not forget that it is also one of combat. Our situation is deadly serious. Remember Herod and the massacre of the innocents! Remember St. Polycarp, whose earthly pilgrimage ended in martyrdom! We are in the arena and our enemy wants to kill us. We must press forward in our sojourn. “The present is not a life to be loved, but to be tolerated,” said St. Augustine. So “as sojourners and pilgrims,” we must adhere closely to St. Peter’s admonition to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). We are not there yet, brothers and sisters. “Nevertheless, in keeping with His promise, we expectantly await new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).¹

1. The following story may serve as a cautionary addendum. St. Paisios once dug a grave for himself and used to lie in it. “Someone asked him, ‘Father, aren’t you afraid?’ ‘What should I fear?’ he replied. ‘We must all be ready for death. Our life is like a journey; just as you stay in a hotel at night and depart in the morning, so do we merely pass through this life. The critical thing is to be prepared for our departure.’” (Sisters of the Holy Hesychasterion of St. John the Theologian, *St. Paisios the Athonite* [Vasilika, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2018], pp. 198–199).

DEACONS' RETREAT 2022

Deacon Abraham Cavalier



ON THE WEEKEND OF SEPTEMBER 16–18, THE DEACONS OF THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND, CHARLESTON, AND THE MID-ATLANTIC GATHERED TOGETHER WITH HIS GRACE BISHOP THOMAS IN PRAYER, WORSHIP, SPIRITUAL GROWTH, AND FELLOWSHIP. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, GRACIOUSLY HOSTED THIS ANNUAL DEACONS' RETREAT. REV. FATHER JOHN EL MASSIH FROM SAINT GEORGE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, WASHINGTON, D.C., BLESSED US BY LEADING SEVERAL SESSIONS.

Saturday morning, we discussed the theological and historical origins of the diaconate. In The Acts of the Apostles 6:1, we find the Body of Christ growing, and a need for additional ministries: “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” In Acts 6:2–6, the Church responds to these growing needs with the first seven Deacons, chosen by the people and ordained by the twelve Apostles:

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of

faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

In the Fourth Century, the Council at Caesarea set the rule that no city should have more than seven deacons, keeping with the seven chosen in Acts. By God's grace, the Church continued to grow, and the need for ministry increased. In the Seventh Century, the Council at Trullo lifted the rule about seven deacons in response to this increasing need. As the Church has grown further, so has the role of the diaconate continued to grow and evolve with



it. When needed, it has taken on administrative responsibilities and assisted in good deeds and works of charity.

Today, we may think of the diaconate as a stepping stone to the priesthood. The scriptural origins and history, however, show us that the diaconate has been and continues to be a distinct office, assisting the bishops and priests, and serving the needs of the Church.

After lunch, Father Peter, Protodeacon John, and Deacon Jerome gave us a tour of the church grounds. They recounted how they were able to purchase the land and begin to build their first church building (now the new church hall) in 1995. Since then, their community has grown, and they've built the new, larger church in which they worship today. Most recently, they have added a cemetery. Hearing about the progress of the growing community of St. John and seeing the beautiful new church and facility was inspiring. As a deacon, I was reminded that God will provide everything we need when we humble ourselves to do His will in service to His Church, and to our brothers and sisters.

We reconvened in the nave of the church for a session on the deacon's role in serving the Divine Liturgy and other services. Father John's experience serving as a deacon with both Metropolitan PHILIP (of blessed memory) and Metropolitan JOSEPH, and his extensive knowledge of the order of services, made this an invaluable session. Father John walked us through several key parts of the services for deacons, focusing primarily on the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. The session concluded with practical "do's and don'ts," and an extended Q&A session lasted until Great Vespers.

Throughout the weekend, our souls were nourished by prayer and worship. We celebrated the Third Hour and Great Vespers on Saturday, and Orthros and the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with Sayidna THOMAS on Sunday morning.

Our bodies were nourished by our gracious hosts at St. John, who provided a delicious breakfast and lunch on Saturday, and a brunch on Sunday following the Liturgy. It was wonderful to share this final meal of the retreat in fellowship with the parishioners of St. Mary, before departing for our homes, families, and parishes.

As we had not had an annual retreat in 2021, it was truly a blessing and joy to be together as brothers again this year, and to renew and strengthen our commitment of service to our Lord, to our Bishop, to our parishes, and to our families. Thank you to His Grace Bishop THOMAS and Father John for their spiritual guidance. We are grateful to our hosts, Father Peter and Khouria Pam, Protodeacon John and Shamma Rosemary, Deacon Jerome, and all the parishioners of St. John Chrysostom for their hospitality and fellowship.

MISGUIDED VIEWS ON CHARITY

Daniel Manzuk

Most of us know, either from TV or movies, or in real life, a person who would give another the shirt off his back. When that same person, however, found himself in need, he would obstinately and categorically refuse any help from anyone. This person is not abiding by the Gospel. It is okay for him to give to another – that makes him look and feel good – but it is beneath him to accept help from others. This is sinful pride and hypocrisy (Romans 12:3). Those who do this are hurting themselves; they are also harming anyone who tries to help them. St. John Chrysostom wrote, “The rich exist for the sake of the poor. The poor exist for the salvation of the rich.” This doesn’t just apply to the socio-economic “upper class.” It could also be read as, “Those who have, exist for the sake of those in need. Those in need exist for the salvation of those who have.” Shakespeare wrote: “The quality of mercy is not strained [that is, *constrained*]. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes” (*Merchant of Venice*, Act 4, Scene 1). While God “both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention” (*Catechetical/Paschal Sermon* of St. John Chrysostom), by proudly refusing any help from anyone for anything, especially if you are truly in want, you are depriving her of the full blessing of giving. This doesn’t mean you have to accept every offer of help (opening a door, helping someone carry something, and so forth); as stated before, this most directly applies to the situation of someone in true need.

Another misguided view of charity comes when the helper intentionally acts against the wishes of the person she is supposedly helping. We’ve all seen or heard about these people, of whom it is often said, “their heart’s in the right place.” The thing that must be remembered when it comes to helping another is that, 95 percent of the time, this means doing what she wants, when she wants, how she wants, and not

doing what she doesn’t want. Habitually disregarding the person’s wishes, and/or forcing her to accept your help, including imposing what you want on her, can be as proudly sinful as the flat refusal of offered help described above. In the opening sequence of the classic TV show “The Odd Couple,” Felix Unger (Tony Randall) is shown approaching an old lady about to cross the street with the help of a Boy Scout. He horns in, waves the Scout off and takes hold of the lady and begins to walk her across the street. She tries to get away, having accepted the Scout’s help, but he won’t let go. She belts him with her purse and the Boy Scout socks him in the arm, leaving him utterly stunned that they should repay his “kindness” like that. It is all well and good that Felix wanted to help, but his compulsive need to help and, more crucially, to be seen as a wonderful person or a true neighbor, overrode his common sense and common courtesy. The woman was being helped; the Scout had things



under control, but it was more important for Felix to get to do what he wanted, than for the other two people, including the woman he was ostensibly helping, to have what they wanted. What guided Felix was not charity, but pride behind a facade of charity: the need to be seen as the Good Samaritan coming to someone’s aid. The person he was helping was for all intents and purposes there solely to help him feel good about himself and for others to admire his goodness. This is utterly backwards. When helping,

we are to put ourselves at the disposal of the other; he is not at our disposal. There are, of course, a few instances where one is justified in imposing help in one's own way (serious medical emergency, taking car keys from someone who is drunk or "high," stopping someone, especially a child, from doing something dangerous, and so on). For the most part, however, helping means self-sacrificially serving the other, and again – his will comes first.

In this article I am not talking about whether charity comes from private or public actors, nor am I implying any position in that regard.

A final misguided view of charity is the denial that it should be provided. There is an unfortunate view among some that people should just "pick themselves up by their own boot straps." If a person is able to do that, God bless them, but not everyone can. Just keep in mind, search all you want, *nowhere* in Scripture does it say, "God helps those who help themselves." Rather, He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33; cf. Luke 11:9–10; John 15:5). Commonly, the person whom Christ helps made an effort to seek His help directly: the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25–34), the paralytic by the sheep's pool (John 5:1–15), the blind man (John 9:1–38), and the leper (Matthew 8:1–3), among others. In some cases, and this is key, others sought aid on the needy person's behalf (Matthew 4:24): the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5–13), the paralytic carried by friends (Mark 2:1–12), and the epileptic child (Matthew 17:14–18), among others. The idea of lifting oneself up by one's "own boot straps" is akin to Tevye's quotes from the pseudo-Good Book, such as, "As the good book says, if you spit in the air, it lands in your face" (from *Fiddler on the Roof*). It is an American Protestant innovation to justify emphasis on the individual, when the genuine message of the Good Book is, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (1 Corinthians 10:24). If everyone helps everyone else, we're all covered. As St. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, we Orthodox Christians are all united in the Body of Christ and are responsible for each other. The individual is not more important than the community, nor is the community more important than the individual. It is a symbiotic, interdependent relationship. The community aids the individual and the individual uses what he has to aid the community; by which both are enhanced and, ideally, brought "to the measure of the

stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). One could fill a page with just the citations, let alone the actual quotations, from the Bible which call on us to help others. As I said before, there are those who can recover from misfortune on their own, but many cannot. Those who cannot, we are obliged to help, so long as they desire to leave their current situation like the paralytic at the sheep's pool (John 5:1–15) or the leper (Matthew 8:1–3). If a person freely and rationally chooses to remain as he is, pray for him and move on. One might say that it is about giving the one in need a fish for today, and as far as she is able (due to impairment, illness or other situation beyond her control), teaching her to fish so she can (to some degree) provide for herself. By refusing to aid others, we also harm our own souls, as St. Paul warns (Hebrews 13:2). An excellent example of this is found in Anton Chekov's story, "The Cossack," in which the wife refuses to share a piece of *kulich* (Russian Pascha cake) with a sick Cossack on the road coming home from the Paschal Liturgy, because it would be scandalous to break the cake before they got home. The Cossack vanished soon after she and her husband rode on, and their fortunes suffered greatly thereafter.

There is, of course, the problem of people who aren't in need still seeking help. One time on the way home from work, a gentleman approached my car and said he was on his way home from an interview and his car ran out of gas a few blocks away. I gave him a few bucks for gas. Two weeks later, driving home again, the same fellow approached me with the story verbatim; I was just another face. I politely declined. In situations like this, as with turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), you let it happen once, but don't put yourself in the position for it to happen again later. Many parishes I know of have gift certificates to grocery stores, gas stations, and so forth, which they give out in place of cash. One parish (especially in winter) gives out two pairs of socks with a bottle of water, a granola bar, and directions to nearby social assistance centers in one of the socks. There are ways to fulfill our Christian obligation, without becoming easy marks for con-artists.

The upshot of all this is, when you are involved in charitable giving, either as a giver or a receiver, remember Christ when He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1–17). Check your pride at the door, whether you are serving others as Christ served the disciples, or allowing another to serve you as the disciples (including Peter ... eventually) did Christ.

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL JUDGES' CHOICE

AMBROSE BUSHELLI, DIOCESES OF THE EAST

Twelve years ago, when I was about five years old, I went to Costco with my mom to “help her” shop. I loved Costco because of all the toys, tools, and clothes, and especially the free samples of food. I was following her around, absent-mindedly gazing at the endless towering rows of things. Despite the rule, “Do not touch anything,” that my mom drilled into me, after a while I saw something I really wanted. I picked it up to ask my mom if she would get it for me, but



when I looked up, it was not my mother I was asking. It turned out that I had been following a random lady! My heart sank and I was utterly shocked. I was completely lost and absolutely terrified. The material paradise had become like hell. Without my mom, I was both helpless and hopeless. She was the only thing I had to guide me around the suddenly colossal and daunting warehouse. Now keep that situation in mind while we explore our Lord's command to become like Him.

In life, we are helpless without the Church, our mother, and hopeless without God, our Father. We may feel like we have found happiness doing our own thing, but if it is not from God, it is fleeting and temporary. Many people pursue what makes them happy temporarily, but they never find true, lasting joy. Fun is fleeting, while true joy only comes from God. A young child's mom is his joy. When I was young and I was away from my mom, I could not be happy. Nothing personal, dad, and brothers! It was my mom.

We all need that same child-parent relationship with God. We must have Christ as our source of joy, identity, and strength. It reminds me of Psalm 18, which the priest recites at the altar just prior to the

kiss of peace in the Liturgy: “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my firm foundation, my refuge, and my deliverer.” This amazing prayer is ours, too, but only if we become like children as our Lord tells us in St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 18, Verse 1, when the disciples audaciously ask Christ, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus Christ responds by saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no

means enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” But why? Why like children? Doesn't Jesus call us to be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves? There are many aspects to a good Christian life. The primary way in which we relate to God, however, is as a child. A young child's love for his parent is characterized most importantly by his honesty, dependence, and identity.

First, a child who is loved has the freedom and trust to be honest. That honesty, especially for us teens, can be brutal, and certainly needs to be held in check. Small children, however, are open with their feelings and always say what they think is true. We should have the same boldness and transparency with our heavenly Father. Second, children are aware of their dependence and seek their answers from their parents instead of proudly trying to figure the answers out themselves. They learn everything from their parents and are completely dependent on them. When my mother walks out of the room, my baby sister crawls after, crying out for her. Little children need their parents to survive. Whether we acknowledge Him or remember Him or thank Him, we are all dependent on God.

Third, a child's identity comes from his parents.

Our admiration for God should compel us to emulate Him. We should live honestly, always asking God for His will to be done, while we live like Jesus Christ. This most important aspect of childhood answers the question that should come to us when hearing this teaching: What does it mean for someone who is already in the Church to be converted? I thought one was converted at baptism? Yes, that is certainly true. Baptism, however, is a new birth, and, like physical birth, is merely a beginning in our growth in God. Conversion culminates in *theosis*, sharing God's life. St. Athanasius the Great explains *theosis* and the Christian life very clearly, saying: "God became man that man might become God." God sees us as His children and wants nothing less than us living in Him. As Christians, we must constantly die to ourselves so Christ can live ever more perfectly within us.

Having reviewed honesty, dependency, and identity, as three important facets of relating to God as our Father, I need quickly to offer an obvious warning, and review a few saintly examples, before returning to that moment in Costco. There is an important distinction to be made between being *childlike* and *childish*. Do not use Christ's commandment as an excuse to remain selfish, naive, or weak in a childish way. To be childish means to be ignorant, greedy, and self-indulgent; to be childlike means to learn the lessons of simplicity, honesty, and dependence on Christ. Solomon the wise tells us to, like little children, "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). St. Paul gives us a clear picture of Christian maturity in writing about love to the church in Corinth. He says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

We have great examples from all the saints who truly put our Lord's teaching into practice and loved God as our Father with all their lives. The saints are inspiring: inspiring in sacrifice; inspiring in service; and inspiring us to sacrifice and service. We also have the witness of many child-saints, including the martyred daughters of St. Sophia, who openly and trustingly emulated their mother's steadfast faith, unwavering hope, and boundless love. Or consider St. Artemius of Verkola, a hard-working, obedient child of a medieval Russian village, whose shrine adorns the camp's sports field. His love for God and

his parents flashes like lightning in our dark, sophisticated, and godless world.

So let me bring you back to my wandering in the Costco warehouse. It felt like forty minutes, though it was probably just forty seconds. A lady found me crying and brought me to the front of the store. The employees made an announcement so my mom could find me. In our lives, the saints guide us to Christ, because when we are lost, we are helpless.

We let our ego take over, and we try to do everything ourselves, but we cannot. We are nothing by ourselves, and until we realize that, we are pretentious! We are proud! We are pathetic! But it is OK, because God is our Father. If we become like little children, we can depend on our Father. I can tell you that from my experience, because after the lady made the announcement, I finally was found by my mom. She came running and scooped me up into her arms. I was safe. I was happy. Finally I was with her. I sat in the shopping cart and let my mom push me around the store. I learned my lesson and realized that I was not ready to be on my own. I needed my mom's help. I gave her control, let her take me around the store, and we made it home!

All we need to do to follow God is get in the "shopping cart" of love and obedience. He will guide us. He will feed us. And He will give us everlasting joy. He pours out His life so we can become like Him. So brothers, sisters, and fathers, if we allow it, our materialistic world mesmerizes, seduces, and separates us from God. Before it is too late, be converted again to become like little children, and rely on God instead of yourselves. Become like children and grow in honesty and trust. Become like children and seek your answers from God alone, and depend exclusively on Him. Become like children and emulate Christ and Christ only, because He is the perfect model. Right now He is pushing a shopping cart through the warehouse of life to carry His little children into heaven. Will you give up your pride and get in?

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

SAM MAALOUF, DIOCESE OF OTTAWA

Your Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Your Graces, Reverend Clergy, brothers and sisters in Christ:

A curious, five-year-old me asked my mom, “What if I don’t go to heaven?” To clarify, I went to a Roman Catholic school at the time. My mom gently replied, “You will.” She knew that was enough to satisfy my younger, childlike mind. Fast forward to today, and I constantly find myself asking the same question: Are we more worthy of the kingdom of heaven as children? In this soft, western world, one that has little liking for the Orthodox Church, growing

up may be discouraged and frowned upon by popular culture, making it difficult to focus on our traditions. Can adults, people who fend for themselves in this difficult, broken world, attain childlike qualities? It seems from Christ’s words in this key verse, that we have to.

When I say *children*, what pops into your mind? Perhaps it’s a younger sibling, a cousin, or another family member, perhaps a few altar boys, or rowdy kids at church. When we see the word *children* or *kid* our minds may drift to their childish characteristics of energy, foolishness, and hyperactive imagination. We may not think, however, of their *childlike* qualities, perhaps hidden by their unpredictable actions.

A few weeks ago, a number of families at our church, including mine, went to watch *Man of God*, a movie portraying the life of Saint Nektarios (played by Aris Servetelis). If you go through a few reviews on the IMDb website, you will find that some say it was very moving, while others were annoyed by the imperfect English spoken by the actors. Nevertheless, many in my group found the film extremely touching. The life of this twentieth-century saint was one of suffering, unjust prosecution, and endless compassion.



As children return to their mothers whenever they need food, help, or guidance, St. Nektarios would continually pray to the Theotokos for the same things. He desired only for the will of God to be completed through him, throwing aside all earthly temptation. No matter the circumstance, he would always turn to his heavenly parents and ask for help. In a world where being childlike, at

least for Saint Nektarios, meant persecution for his nationality, and even threats to his physical health, he would never back away from his firm belief, deeply rooted in his holy Mother and Father.

Back in the cinema, while many of the parents were solemnly watching the screen, silent tears running down the faces of many, the kids seemed antsy, waiting for the movie to end so they could go outside, run around, and do whatever children do. One can assume that Christ wouldn’t want us to emulate the impatience and comical actions of the young. Outside of serious, quiet places, kids try to understand everything as best as they can, so they do what they do best: they ask questions. I’m sure that at least a handful of people have tried to stop a child from repeatedly asking “Why?” The true intention of children is difficult to pin down, mainly because it changes rapidly from innocence to playfulness, and even to annoyance. No matter the situation, however, the intentions of a child remain pure, even if they last for a short period. If all had pure intentions, rather than having them mixed in a storm of emotion, we would be able to control them, steering them away from malevolence, negative judgment, or jealousy, towards compassion,

gratitude, and patience. St. Paisios the Athonite put it clearly, when he said, “When your children are still small, you have to help them understand what is good. That is the deepest meaning of life.”

How then, therefore, can Christians become Christians? Can we, Christians, convert to Christianity? It seems paradoxical, of course. In Chapter 5 of Matthew’s Gospel, Christ speaks directly, stating that we must let our “Yes” be “Yes,” and our “No” be “No.” Furthermore, He warned that we mustn’t swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool. Later on, in the twenty-sixth Chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Peter denies Jesus with an oath, saying, “I do not know the Man!” And to quote Chapter 18: “Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives me.” In our daily lives, it’s easy to get angry at the smallest things, and little children can sometimes add to our long list of stresses. Jesus, however, also states that whoever humbles himself [as this little child] is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4). Children are also exceptionally good at not holding grudges, because of their innocence and childlike purity. I can assure you that I’ve lied, I’ve sworn, and I am by no means close to being childlike. What can I do to realize childlike purity within myself, in a world where the toughest prosper and the weak perish? Physical strength is emphasized in the western culture of self-fulfillment, but spiritual strength is the only way to understand, not just the teachings of Christ, but the world he created. Spirituality allows us to look past the unnecessary, past what holds us back from God. Children, with a wide-eyed curiosity and the desire for understanding, are like a clean slate. A clean slate is nothing, however, without the chalk. Similarly, a student is nothing without a teacher. When Jesus blessed the children in Chapter 19 of Matthew’s Gospel, he conveyed their significance, declaring: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Additionally, St. Nektarios of Aegina eloquently explained the importance of children and their proper upbringing, stating, “The education of children must begin from infancy, so that the child’s mental faculties may, from their very first appearance, be directed right from the beginning toward the good, the gentle, the true, and may be removed from the evil, the obscene, and the false.”

Conclusively, conversion is completely changing

oneself, and the removal of all doubt from one’s heart. It is wholly understanding the information given to us. While grasping the Bible and all its knowledge is an exceedingly difficult task, God gives us a lifetime to do it. We are fortunate enough to carry a Bible, or even wear a crucifix, unlike the Christians in many Muslim Arabic countries. If I, or any other of my friends, peers, teens, and others, didn’t spend time understanding the teachings of Christ, we’d be wasting our lives and drifting towards self-proclaimed righteousness, just like the Pharisees. St. John Chrysostom stated:

Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide. If a child learns a trade, or is highly educated for a lucrative profession, all this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions, or surround himself with wealth, but who requires nothing... . Don’t think that only monks need to learn the Bible; children about to go out into the world stand in greater need of Scriptural knowledge (*Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 21).

Jesus calls us to be children: not to be *childish*, but to be *childlike*. This is to put all our trust in our heavenly Father and Mother, just as children follow their mom and dad. It is to believe in something without having to see it, not blindly following Christ, but accepting the traditions and works that have been passed down for two thousand years. This is the childlikeness Jesus refers to. It’s so easy, a child could do it.

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS

GILBERT, Deacon Anthony (Gaelan), to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL on Sunday, October 16, 2022, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. He is a senior at St. Vladimir's Seminary, Crestwood, New York.

OTTE, Gabriel, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on November 6, 2022, at St. Stephen Church, Campbell, California.

SLOCKETT, Romanos, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on July 31, 2022, at St. Elias Orthodox Church, Austin, Texas.

ELEVATIONS

KING, Fr. James, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest on November 13, 2022, by His Grace Bishop ANTHONY, at the Basilica of St. Mary, Livonia, Michigan, where he is the assistant pastor.

BOJRAB, Deacon Dennis, to the rank and dignity of Protodeacon on November 13, 2022, by His Grace Bishop ANTHONY, at the Basilica of St. Mary, Livonia, Michigan, where he is attached.

NERREAU, Fr. Christopher, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest on October 30, 2022, at Emmanuel Orthodox Church, West Brookfield, Massachusetts.

DEPARTED

His Beatitude HERMAN (Swaiko), former Archbishop of Washington and New York, Metropolitan of All America and Canada, of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ September 6, 2022. His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, leader of the Antiochian Archdiocese, sent a letter of condolence to His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON of the OCA. "In addition to being my close personal friend, he was a true friend and partner of our Antiochian Archdiocese," His Eminence wrote. "We also share in your joy and gratitude in remembering His Beatitude's years of

service and the blessings of his ministry."

Shamassy Elizabeth MCDONALD, wife of Archdeacon Vladimir McDonald of St. Mark Church of Denver, Colorado, peacefully fell asleep in Christ on October 3, 2022, at her home, attended by Archdeacon Vladimir and her sister, who was visiting from the McDonalds' homeland of England.

Mary Nasser DIBS, 88, a founding member of two churches in Southern California and a pioneer in the leadership of the Antiochian Women's ministry in the Archdiocese, reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on November 28, 2022. With her late husband, Dr. George Dibs, a longtime member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, Mary helped to establish St. Luke Church of Garden Grove in 1959, and St. Mark Church of Irvine in 1986. At the latter, she established the bookstore that she ran for 32 years. Mary was also an early benefactor of St. Barbara Monastery (OCA) in Santa Paula. From 1974 to 1976, Mary served as the first President of Antiochian Women of the Western Region (now the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West). From 1983 to 1985, she served as President of the North American Board of the Antiochian Women. In Mary's tenure there, she completed a \$100,000 fundraising drive for the Antiochian Village, and helped to raise \$15,000 for the newly created Married Seminarian Fund, and \$30,000 for projects of the Patriarchate of Antioch. Throughout her life, Mary was known for encouraging leadership among the women of the Church. The meetings that she ran included workshops for development and spiritual enrichment.

Gregory LAHAM, 73, of Westwood, Massachusetts, reposed peacefully in the Lord from complications due to Parkinson's Disease. He leaves behind his dear and devoted wife of 51 years, Deborah (MacLean) and two loving sons, James G. Laham and his wife, Lisa, of Chelmsford, and Keith

G. Laham and his wife, Jennifer, of Dedham. He was also the cherished “Grampy” to Martin, Jordan and Savannah Laham. Greg is survived by many family members, nieces, nephews, and friends. He is predeceased by his parents, Herbert and Lorraine (Deban) Laham, and his brother, Jeffrey Laham. Greg was the owner of Sullivan’s Pharmacy in Roslindale since 1976. He was a graduate of Boston Latin School and the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, class of 1973. Gregory Laham served the Archdiocese as a Board Member, and particularly supported the Antiochian Village and clergy.

Gabriel Gergi HABIB reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on September 5, 2022. Gaby was preceded in death by his parents Gergi and Rose, and his sister, Laudy. He is survived by his wife, Kathryn, and his daughters, Anna Sophia, and Maria Gabrielle, and their families, as well as his siblings in Lebanon: Michel Habib and family, Raymonda Traboulsi and family, and Angèle Moussalem and family. Gaby served as a founder and longtime General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), the Middle East Regional General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the General Secretary of the Orthodox Youth Movement (MJO), the General Secretary of the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth Movements (SYNDESMOS), the co-initiator of the World Conference of Christians for Palestine (WCCP), and was a founding member of the Lebanese National Committee on Islamo-Christian Dialogue. In 2007, Gaby was also instrumental in organizing the Christian churches and leaders in the USA by forming CAMECT (Christian and Middle Eastern Churches Together) with its center in New York City.

Great Economist ANTONY Gabriel, whose priestly ministry spanned six decades, five parishes and a host of Archdiocesan organizations, reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on Wednesday, November 2, 2022. Fr. Antony, 82, was born in Syracuse, New York. Soon after he graduated from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in 1962, Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir) ordained him to the holy priesthood, and Fr. Antony began his first parish assignment at St. George Church of Phoenix, Arizona. Fr. Antony then founded St. George Church of Cicero, Illinois, before serving at St. George Church of Washington, D.C., St. Elias Church of Sylvania, Ohio, and St. George Church of Montreal, Que-

bec, the latter which he pastored for more than 30 years. In Montreal, he facilitated the welcomes and relocation of Lebanese refugees from their homeland’s “uncivil war,” as Fr. Antony called it, in the 1980s. He did the same for Syrian refugees fleeing the war in their homeland in the 2010s. St. George Church doubled in size to one thousand families during his tenure, and he helped establish St. Mary Church in Montreal. In 1976, Fr. Antony became a founding member and the first chaplain of The Order of Ignatius of Antioch. He also organized the Department of Conventions and Conference Planning, created the Antiochian Heritage Foundation, and lectured on Antiochian Church history at the Antiochian House of Studies. Fr. Antony often accompanied Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba) to the Middle East. Sayidna PHILIP led the celebrations of Fr. Antony’s 50th anniversary in the holy priesthood in 2012. Fr. Antony retired from active ministry in 2015 and moved to Tucson, Arizona.

Rev. John FALCONE, 91, reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on Monday, December 5, 2022. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Khouria Diana (Mary), and his son and daughter-in-law, Rev. Jason and Khouria Cadie Falcone. Fr. John was born on July 27, 1931, to Anthony and Minerva Falcone in Washington, D.C. After graduating from St. Mary’s College in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1953, he completed a degree in theology from the University of Louvain, Belgium, in 1957. Fr. John then served in a broad range of ecclesiastical and educational roles. He received the degree of Educational Specialist in 1970, and Doctor of Ministry in 2000. Fr. John was ordained as an Orthodox Christian priest in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America by His Grace Bishop BASIL in 2008. He served parishes in the Denver area where he retired.

CHARITIES CORNER

Grant Update: In each issue of *The WORD*, The Charitable Outreach Committee will highlight a recipient of a grant from the Grant Program of the Food for Hungry People and Charitable Outreach Program.

St. George, New Kensington, Pennsylvania. The Charitable Outreach Committee recently awarded St. George Orthodox Church, New Kensington, a \$5,000 grant to help and expand eight community outreach programs. The programs ordinarily

funded through church fundraisers (interrupted by the pandemic) have expanded to meet the needs of the community. St. George outreach programs include an Emergency Food Distribution, Holiday Dinner Program, Grab-and-Go Dinner Program, Neighborhood Lunch Program, Brown Bag Lunch Program, Food Pantry, Grab-N-Go Fresh Express, and the Pantry Program. With these programs local adults and children that are hungry, or are in risk of hunger, are provided with food. These volunteer-based programs are run by the Parish Council. All the programs are located at the church, with the exception of the Brown Bag Lunch Program and the Pantry Program, which offer delivery to the neighbors in the community, and the Grab-and-Go Dinner Program, in which the meals are distributed by church volunteers from a local nonprofit restaurant that prepares the food. The Emergency Food Distribution Programs began in 2000, but grew with the rising need in 2020. The Charitable Outreach Committee and FFHP and Charitable Outreach are blessed to partner with St. George Church as they continue assisting their neighbors in need.

The Past Season of Giving: We just celebrated the season of giving, which means it is time to start thinking about this year. As we reflect on how we sat down with our friends and family this past Thanksgiving and Christmas, before a table of fruitful offerings, let's not forget about others who may be less fortunate. This year, we are highlighting the Day of Giving, which fell on Tuesday, November 29. "Giving Tuesday" has become a new tradition across America. After we reflect on what we are thankful for on Thanksgiving, and shop on Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday, let's keep on giving. Set a calendar reminder for Giving Tuesday 2023, on November 28, and help others with the necessity of food.

For assistance in establishing or expanding your church charitable programs, check the Archdiocese website for the Charitable Outreach Committee, Food For Hungry People and Charitable Outreach grant application.

St. Nicholas, Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 2020, the Charitable Outreach Committee awarded St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Grand Rapids, a \$10,000 grant to assist with their program, Works of Mercy – Kids' Food Basket. The Kids' Food Basket was founded in 2022 as a direct response to childhood hunger, after a Grand Rapids

public school principal witnessed some children rummaging through garbage for food after school. Since COVID-19, Kids' Food Basket is playing a critical role in providing healthy, life-affirming food for more low-income children and families in West Michigan. The Kids' Food Basket is led by a board of dedicated volunteers who have the expertise and passion required to expand a successful emergency program originally launched in January 2019, during the winter vortex that shut down schools across West Michigan.

Welcome 2023: A new year, means new intentions. Many people start the year with new goals in mind, from the way they eat, to the way they exercise. Sadly, there are others out there that are less fortunate and can't eat nourishing food. Some may go hungry for days. Let's make the year 2023 about helping others! Reach out to your local community to see what can be done to help end hunger. Donate to an organization in your area, or start a new program! There are many ways to help people in need, if you want to. Let's start today!

For assistance in establishing or expanding your church charitable programs, check the Archdiocese website for the Charitable Outreach Committee, Food For Hungry People and Charitable Outreach application. Make a difference this new year!

Children's Relief Fund Update: By the grace of God, over the past year, we have been able to securely move funds to Lebanon and have "caught up" for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Funds from 2021 were transferred in November, and will be distributed to the children prior to Christmas. We are now back on schedule for 2022 donations to be sent in early 2023. This has been a challenge for all of us, and we are grateful for the patience of donors as we worked through the banking situation in Lebanon. Palestine distributions are up to date. Look for updates on the Children's Relief Fund in the next issue of *The WORD*. **New sponsors are always welcome!**

2022 CLERGY SYNAXIS AT THE ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE



On October 17–20, twenty-five priests gathered with His Grace Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) at the Antiochian Village for several days of prayer, continuing education, fellowship, and rest. Daily services were held every morning and evening, along with a hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Wednesday morning with Sayidna THOMAS. Keynote sessions were provided by Fr. Stephen De Young, pastor of Archangel Gabriel Church in Lafayette, Louisiana, on the topic of his book titled, *God Is a Man of War*. In addition, a graveside Hierarchical Memorial was prayed by the brothers who gathered at the cemetery, despite the strong, cold winds. All in attendance look forward to gathering again next year, October 16–19, 2023, at the Village, and encourage all Orthodox clergy to consider joining them for this renewing and informative synaxis.



COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

BISHOP BASIL
CELEBRATES 100+
YEARS WITH
ST. ELIJAH
OKLAHOMA CITY!

The 1920s brought much change, culture, and even hard times to the United States. There was a lot of hope and optimism at the beginning of the decade, because of the end of World War I. The “Roaring Twenties” were filled with excitement. Charles Lindbergh was the first person to fly a solo, nonstop transatlantic flight. From the growth of the movie industry to the start of the mass production of cars and radios for the home, the Twenties were a time of radical **change**.

Oklahoma had become a state in 1907. New migration from Lebanon of many families began, and talks of a new church were underway. A small congregation of Orthodox Christians, Lebanese immigrants, had formed and met in Oklahoma City to discuss establishing a permanent Orthodox Church. With the permission of Bishop AFTIMIOS (Ofiesh), they petitioned Patriarch GREGORY (Haddad) of Antioch to send Fr. Shukrallah Shadid from Lebanon to Oklahoma City.

On October 5, 1920, Fr. Shukrallah and Khouria Khatoum arrived in Oklahoma City, and they moved to their new home, where the first services were held. St. Elijah Antiochian Orthodox Church of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was born.



The Church continued to grow throughout the 1920s. On September 14, 1931, the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, the first Church renovation was completed to comply with Orthodox tradition, and a building was dedicated and consecrated. The new building, a 30 by 40-foot room, was purchased for \$2,000.00. The Church was officially dedicated to St. Elijah, named after a Chapel in Jdeidat, Lebanon.

Fast forward 102 years from 1920, and enter Bishop BASIL to celebrate St. Elijah!

Plans for the St. Elijah centennial were set in 2018, when a committee was appointed to give us two years to create a great plan for the celebration. And wow, did we plan! From that August day in 2018, the committee met and met! An entire weekend was planned, to culminate on September 6, 2020! But God had a different plan.

Like everyone and everything else, St. Elijah had to postpone the celebration from September 2020 to one year later, on account of the COVID pandemic. But wait . . . As plans were set for a “year later” celebration in September 2021, the pandemic reached a new high and the second event had to be postponed.

It’s most important to note and commend the clergy, staff, and parishioners of St. Elijah. Yes, all parishes in the Archdiocese thrived somehow during the pandemic, and St. Elijah was no different. Oklahoma shut down, sheltered in place, on Wednesday, March 17, 2020. Five days later, St. Elijah was STILL open, virtually! Our head clergy, Fr. John Salem and staff, held the first Divine Liturgy virtually on Sunday, March 21, 2022. Through YouTube and Facebook, parishioners “attended” church! Families “stayed at home” and watched

the service. The comments and praises were rampant during the services. “Amen,” “Thank you Fathers,” “Thank God,” and “miss everyone” were all common chat comments. Cross and prayer hands emojis became our symbol of love and communication. This continued until we were able to open “partially” and have half of the congregation attend a Saturday service while the other half attended Sunday service. No hugging, no sitting next to each other, everyone in masks – this became the new norm. Resilience!

Finally, like all other parishes, we reopened for “real.” The Centennial Committee reconvened, and plans were set for the third time, for a third date: August 28, 2022. Bishop BASIL was on board for the third time!

In the beginning, we planned a three-day weekend. With the “new normal” of Zoom meetings, binge television watching, and casual life, however, we changed. Our day, Sunday, August 28, 2022, started with a beautiful Hierarchical Divine Liturgy led by our own Diocesan Bishop BASIL. His sermon spoke volumes of what St. Elijah was in the beginning through to that date, and encapsulated the triumphs and victories over the four years of planning. “Thank God! And happy 100th-plus Anniversary, St. Elijah,” he proclaimed!

We planned an elegant, yet simple, luncheon for the *entire* parish. We set a fantastic meal, served by our own Ned’s Catering. We hired an amazing photographer who captured the entire service and event. We listened to selected songs from our wonderful choir! We had beauti-

ful flower arrangements for every table. Smiles! Hugs! Tears! Family! Over 500 attended the service and banquet! We were *together!*

We had a few remarks celebrating St. Elijah. We thanked those who went before us and broke the ground. Above all, we celebrated each other. Our focus was on being together again as one parish.

The celebration could not have been better. From the formal lunch to the special children’s activities we planned in our gym during the banquet, *everyone* celebrated 100+ years! A special thanks to our Bishop BASIL for making the celebration complete.

What did we learn? A formal celebration with a grand banquet is not necessary; a celebration for *all* is! Those founders of 1920 would be proud; and we know we have honored each of them. Where the world will be in 2120, God knows, but St. Elijah will be celebrating 200 years!

Whether we migrated to St. Elijah in the beginning, were born into St. Elijah, or migrated to St. Elijah from another church, we were and *are* St. Elijah! To the Glory of God, we the parishioners of St. Elijah say, “Happy 100+ years anniversary, St. Elijah!”

ST. GEORGE, CANTON, OHIO, CELEBRATES 100TH ANNIVERSARY

It is difficult to put a hundred years into one weekend. The Hundredth Anniversary Celebration in Canton, Ohio, May 6–8, 2022, did just that, nonetheless. The festivities, the meetings, the anniversary book, the breaking of bread and warm introductions, all brought to the forefront

a handful of Middle-Eastern immigrants, new to Canton, Ohio, whose lives revolved around their Eastern Orthodox heritage and their families. Their faith and perseverance led them to build a church on Cherry Avenue, the hub of their neighborhood, in 1922. By the grace of God, their vision has maintained that church a hundred years later.

The festivities began Friday evening with the Angelic Sponsors Reception. The evening was a casual dinner party and reception with His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, His Grace Bishop ANTHONY and our own Fr. Michael Corbin and Fr. Basil Shaheen. This event was held at the home of Dr. Kaleel and Rhonia Shaheen, Chairperson of the weekend. It was a relaxing evening of sharing. Joining the group were Fr. Michael Massouh, a Canton native now living in Florida and Sub-deacon Elio Nicolas, assistant to the Metropolitan. Fr. Corbin’s uncle, Proto-deacon George Moubayed from St. Mark, Irvine, California, also came for the celebration. Canton is the hometown to seven other clergy: Fr. George H. Shaheen, Archbishop Michael Shaheen, Fr. George F. Shaheen, Fr. Joseph Shaheen, Fr. George Rados, Fr. Stephen Ziton, Fr. Michael Massouh and Fr. Basil Shaheen. Interestingly, Fr. Massouh is the grandson of the first priest of St. George, Fr. Spyridon Massouh. St. George was also the home to five Khourias – Mary Shaheen, Lynn Gabriel, Corrine Mahshie, Jackie Rados and Linda Shaheen. Each of them left their unique footprint that has lifted St. George to a higher spiritual level.

Saturday morning, a Youth

Breakfast chaired by Nina Shaheen was held in the lower level of the church. A large group, young and old, gathered to enjoy breaking bread with our honored hierarchs. Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop ANTHONY welcomed a question-and-answer session. It uncovered some interesting thoughts in the minds of our inquisitive Sunday School students about our Eastern Orthodox religion, 2,000 years old, built on the teachings of Christ, and difficult to understand at times, especially for the young. They also installed a time capsule in the church's 1922 safe. (Our St. George Sunday School was established in 1938.)

Great Vespers were held at the church in the evening, followed by the Grand Banquet and Hafli at Brookside Country Club, with 297 in attendance. The venue was beautiful, with the meal in the main dining room, and the music and dancing on an attached covered veranda. Dr. Kaleel J. Shaheen II served as Master of Ceremonies. Sarah Joseph started the evening with a beautiful rendition of "America the Beautiful." A toast followed, given by parishioner Bea Shaheen McPherson, who was celebrating her hundredth birthday along with the church. Bea was honored this weekend in a traveling exhibit, "Military Mapping Maidens," as a female mapmaker in World War II.

Metropolitan JOSEPH congratulated the parish and acknowledged the dedication of the forefathers and the generations after them who have preserved and continued their work, as well as those who have embraced the Orthodox faith. He advised us to

love the faith, live it and share it. "We have nothing to be proud of and everything to be grateful for."

Bishop ANTHONY addressed the leadership of the church, Father Michael and Khouria Mira, the clergy that have come before them, and members of the Parish Council. The ministry of the church, he said, is not one, but all working together and "the people of St. George are known by the light of Christ that shines through them and is expressed in (their) love."

The Mayor of Canton, Tom Bernabei, addressed the history of St. George as an inner-city beacon and congratulated the church on being "one of the oldest and most-respected churches in the area." He presented St. George with a "Mayor's Proclamation" from the City of Canton.

Two parishioners were honored that evening. Rosemary Shaheen received the Archdiocese Meritorious Service Award from His Eminence. She was our organist for 70 years, noting that at one point during those years she was standing up playing a piano on the landing to the bal-

cony! She played under all of the choir directors, starting with her uncle, Dr. Salem Shaheen, who organized the choir in 1951, followed by Dr. Loyd Shaheen and his nephew James F. Shaheen. Today the choir is led by Misti Tidman. Chanters have also played a prominent role in our services. The most long-serving and beloved was the late Deeb Turk. Rosemary is also the seamstress of the altar, repairing robes and creating beautiful coverings for the altar tables.

Tim Wires, a former Special Deputy with the Stark County Sheriff's Office and the Northern Ohio Violent Fugitives Task Force, received the St. George Medal of Valor and the Archdiocese Meritorious Service Award. He was shot in the line of duty on March, 2021, and is considered a hero in saving the lives of others on that date.

Sunday's Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was also the commemoration of St. Joseph of Arimathea and marked the name day of our beloved Metropolitan JOSEPH, may God grant him many blessed years! The day was



also highlighted by the blessing of Iyad Bechara to serve as a Sub-deacon in the church. He has long been one of the church chanters and serves as an assistant to Fr. Michael in many capacities. Also, nine high school graduates were each presented with the Orthodox Study Bible following the Liturgy.

The luncheon after church was attended by parishioners and out-of-town guests in the St. George Social Center. This hall has been the center of many social events and dinners since the groundbreaking for its construction on April 19, 1970. It is only one of the many additions, renovations, and remodeling projects that have made the church more accessible and more far-reaching. The latest of these projects was the addition of a hydraulic lift to assist parishioners in getting from our doorway up to the church and down to the lower level. This lift and new addition were blessed by Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop ANTHONY after services on this date and dedicated to the memory of the departed parishioners of the former Holy Cross Church in Canton.

Our Anniversary Book this year was more personal than in the past, welcoming family stories and a “remember-when” section. It showcased memories, as well as memorials and congratulations. The history, compiled by Fr. Michael, was the story of a dedicated lineage of parishioners and their service to the church they loved. Andria Michael oversaw this project, assisted by Sherry Albaugh, Claudia Shaheen, Eddie Karoue, and Joe Joseph.

It is also noteworthy that on Holy Saturday, April 23, three

new families, fifteen individuals, were received into Orthodoxy. It was a historic morning, a very moving morning, and was the actual date of our church’s consecration on April 23, 1922.

Over the past hundred years, there have been so many clergy and individuals whose lives have intertwined – for a minute or a lifetime, in stories from the past, in a memory, or in the present. There have been so many weddings, baptisms and funerals that have brought together our hearts. There have been so many activities the last hundred years – Sunday School, basketball tournaments, Middle Eastern Dinners, coffee hours, St. George Day celebrations, picnics, Bible Studies, ladies activities – it would be impossible to name them all – binding us together in different times, on different levels, and in different ways.

The blessing of the Lord is with St. George of Canton today. And it is the same Lord that was with our forefathers a hundred years ago. With His love and constant guidance, and with all of the lessons learned, St. George Church joins together to move into the next hundred years!

Carol Shaheen

SAINT GEORGE
CATHEDRAL HOSTS
YET ANOTHER
SPECTACULAR “LOVE
BALL”!

On Saturday May 21, after two years of postponement due to the pandemic, the community of Saint George Cathedral in Coral Gables, Florida, came together once more as a family to celebrate their annual “Saint George

Cathedral Love Ball.” The title of this year’s Love Ball was “One Family in Christ” (Romans 12:5). Indeed, the community came together to celebrate as one family all of their graduates (Middle School, High School, and College) and to render homage to members who have devoted their time, treasures, and talents in the service of the Church.

The weekend celebrations began with a Great Vespers Service in the presence of His Grace, Bishop NICHOLAS Ozone, Rev. Fr. Gustavo Alfonso, and the Dean of Cathedral, Rev. Fr. Joseph Hector Abouid. Afterwards, a Formal Gala took place in the Cathedral Hall. The Love Ball Committee, chaired by Mrs. Tania Soufia, did a wonderful job in planning, preparing, and executing the impeccable events of that mesmerizing evening. “It is important to recognize selfless behavior, not only because it sets a standard for us to aspire to, but it also creates the quality of excellence by which Christ’s church becomes recognized,” said Mrs. Soufia. The night began with live entertainment from the Cathedral’s Choir director and talented singer/pianist Mr. Jackson King, followed by the presentation of the Graduates of 2022. Then, the Dean’s Certificate of Distinguished Service was presented to Mr. Said El Haj and Mrs. Jacqueline Barakat-Wanna. Finally, the prestigious Saint George Medal of Merit was granted to three very special members of the community: Mr. and Mrs. George and Widaa Khoury, and Mary Bikhazy (posthumously). The last was received on her behalf by her husband, Dr. George Bikhazi,

and their daughter, Linda. The entire community was brought to tears when Dr. George Bikhazi addressed the attendees after receiving the Medal of Merit on his late wife's behalf.

Another highlight of the night was the announcement of the winner of the Archpriest Fr. +Michael Husson Scholarship from the Order of St. Ignatius, Saint George Cathedral Chapter. This scholarship is awarded to the best essay by a High School Graduate of the year. This year's essay topic was the following: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). The question essayists were to address was this: "In light of this verse of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, how do you understand different people with different backgrounds and different personalities to be part of the 'one body' of Christ?" This year's winner was Jorgina Jahjah.

After this, Fr. Joseph gave a few words to his flock expressing his joy in seeing the "Cathedral Family" reunited on such a special occasion. "As we finally come out of one of the worst periods in our modern history, the COVID-19 pandemic, we have a blessing to come together as 'One Family in Christ'... I can think of no better theme for the first Love Ball after the pandemic." Fr. Joseph congratulated the entire Parish Council, the Love Ball Committee, the graduates, and all of the recipients of the particular awards. He finished his speech with an explanation of the true nature of a united family in Christ: "We don't choose

who are parents are.... We don't choose our siblings.... We don't choose who our fellow parishioners are.... We don't even choose who our Shepherd is.... We can, however, choose if and how to love them. This is the true essence of what 'One Family in Christ' is all about."

Then, the keynote speaker, His Grace, Bishop NICHOLAS, expressed his joy and gratitude in being once more present with his cathedral family. "Another Love Ball is upon us as we celebrate the success of so many members graduating from various levels of education and of service to the Church.... In everything we do, we use our God-given gifts to accomplish our work.... Our brains, power, our strength, our health, our wealth – no matter how small it may be – and our very breath are granted to us by our Creator to use in our lives. Without God, we accomplish nothing," he said. His Grace ended his speech to the community with a benediction: "May God continue in His support for the Cathedral and shower her and all of you with His many blessings for many decades until His second coming."

The night ended with Middle Eastern live entertainment from the renowned musician Mr. Farah Farah and his maestro, Mr. Elias Rishmawi. Finally, on Sunday morning His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS presided over a hierarchical Divine Liturgy which brought the weekend celebrations to a close.

May God continue to bless the Cathedral of Saint George, the "Spiritual Oasis of the Americas" (His Eminence Metropolitan +PHILIP, February 26, 1967).

SAINT PETER AND PAUL CHURCH HOST FALL FESTIVAL

Along with the cool crisp days of autumn, our communities gather together in earnest preparation of fall festivals to celebrate the harvest and heritage.

At St. Peter and Paul Church in Potomac, Maryland, among the creative booths and scrumptious food lines, one particular table stood out.

Proudly staffed by young girls



from Sunday school, these devoted young ladies got the word out to Sunday school over the summer, to weave bracelets, prayer ropes and intricate inspirational art works, to do their small part for charity.

Julia and Lydia Tomei, Tamara

Manasseh, Natalie, Elaini, Victoria Misleh, and Rima Bailey, touched a couple thousand people with their simple and innocent gesture of love and service.

Those of us who walked by to gaze at their beautiful creations, were touched by this image of servant hood. It remains one of the highlights of the weekend.

BISHOP ANTHONY ORDAINS PRIEST FOR ST. NICHOLAS MISSION

The community of St. Nicholas Mission in Davenport, Iowa, recently celebrated a momentous event when parish native son Deacon Jared Johnson was ordained to the priesthood by the hand of His Grace, Bishop ANTHONY. The groundwork for this church community began to be laid in the summer of 2009. An initial planning meeting was held in the Johnsons' home. This was followed up with a visit by the Very Rev. Fr. Peter Gillquist of blessed memory, a few months later. As momentum began to build, the Quad Cities Mission, as it was then known, had their first vespers service on May 4, 2010, led by Fr. Ignatius Valentine in the borrowed space of a nearby Lutheran church. Jared was designated the lay leader of the small community and they began to do reader's vespers weekly in this same space. In time, they were served by Fr. James Mackoul, who traveled over 250 miles from St. Louis, Missouri, once or twice a month to lead them in prayer. They moved to their own storefront location in 2012, and then to a bigger location in 2016. They were given to the patronage

of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in 2013.

The St. Nicholas community was given a boost when Jared was ordained to the diaconate in 2017, serving alongside Fr. James. When Fr. James, who tirelessly served the mission for 12 years, decided that he could no longer make this long journey on such a regular basis, a petition was sent to Metropolitan JOSEPH asking that Deacon Jared be ordained to the priesthood in order to become the pastor of the community. This request was granted and it was decided that Bishop ANTHONY would lay his hands on Deacon Jared when he was visiting St. Ignatius Church in Fitchburg, Wisconsin. *Axios* to Fr. Jared! Congratulations to St. Nicholas Mission!

ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH OF GRAND RAPIDS CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL

"Our hearts burn within us not for nostalgia, but that God has walked with us in these 100 years."

When reflecting on the centennial anniversary of St. Nicholas Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, its pastor, Very Rev. Michael Nasser, remembered the words of the disciples after they spoke to the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection: "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32)

Their Graces, Bishop ANTHONY, Bishop THOMAS, Bishop JOHN and Bishop NICHOLAS led the festivities of October 15-16, 2022, with

more than a dozen clergy and hundreds of faithful. Former and retired pastors of St. Nicholas Church returned to see the fruits of their labors. The community founded by Orthodox Christians who immigrated from the Middle East now includes their descendants and those who converted to the true faith.

After Great Vespers on Saturday night, the bishops blessed the new Youth Room and met with the children and teenagers of the parish. The bishops took several questions, including how to discern their callings in life. Bishop ANTHONY told them to read and live Matthew 5-7, find mentors and spiritual fathers, and discover their own talents. Bishop THOMAS reminded them to pray to God and ask Him what He wants them to do. Bishop JOHN reminded them to make themselves, their space and their time holy. Bishop NICHOLAS told them that their spiritual fathers will track their progress on the path to their callings.

At the banquet that evening, Bishop JOHN said to the community that its future success must reflect its rich legacy. "When we gather as St. Nicholas, we received the same food, same message and same faith as those gone before us. We put flesh on Christ for the world so the world can receive Him."

On Sunday morning in the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy, Bishop ANTHONY preached on the Lord's parable of the sower (Luke 8:5-15). He reminded the congregation that God the Father gave us His secrets – or rather, His mysteries or sacraments – just as He gave them to His Son. Therefore, we must share the

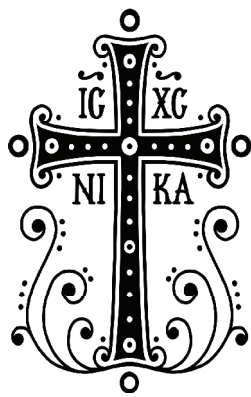
word of God with those who are lost and bring them back to the fold.

At the conclusion of the Liturgy, the bishops blessed the church's new memorial wall that bears the names of community members who have reposed. Then, Bishop ANTHONY inducted new members into The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the charitable arm of the Archdiocese.



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The Children's Relief Fund



I greet you on behalf of all the children of the **Children's Relief Fund (CRF)**, past and present. We pray that you receive this letter in their gratitude and appreciation for the love and concern you have shown them in our Lord's name. We pray for your continued health and prosperity in this New Year.

This letter brings you our *"2023 New Year Appeal."* The purpose of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is to provide funds for the children in need in Lebanon and Palestine, and the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The **CRF**, under the *"Department of Charitable Outreach,"* has been a godsend to hundreds of needy children and their families. We are so proud and privileged to help and support them financially – but more importantly, to show them our love and concern.

We will continue to assist these children, just as we have since the Fund's inception in 1983. We have provided close to **4 million dollars** in aid, but we can't do it alone. Your past participation has brought much joy to so many young suffering innocents. **100% of your donation goes directly to the sponsored child and no money is used for administrative services.**

You can help change the life of a child by being a sponsor for as little as \$400 a year, just \$7.69 per week, \$1.10 per day. Donations in any amount are always welcome. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you their name, age, address, and a brief biography. Your child will correspond with you, sending you letters and pictures about their life. You will be able to develop a special bond and personal relationship with them.

Your assistance will improve the lives of these children and give them a chance for a better future.

For those of you who are already sponsoring a child, we



offer you our most profound thanks. Please continue your love and support. New sponsors are encouraged to open a window of concern and join this humanitarian effort to lift the burden off these children.

In anticipation of your kind response, we thank you for your generosity, and pray you enjoy the New Year with health, happiness, and prosperity. May God bless you and yours and give you strength in the coming days.

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