GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES
OF ALL NATIONS

ΠΟΡΕΥΒΕΝΤΕΣ ΜΑΓΩΤΕΥΣΑΤΕ
ΠΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ ΕΟΝΗ
ΣΧΩΝΙ ΜΗ ΒΕΝΙ ΔΙΣΕΡΕΙΡΥ
ΝΓΑ ΤΕ ΑΙΤΗΕ ΚΟΜΒΕΤ
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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, in hard copy, on disk or e-mailed, should be double-spaced for editing purposes and provided as a Microsoft Word text.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:
U.S.A. and Canada, $20.00
Foreign Countries, $26.00
Single Copies, $3.00

The WORD (USPS626-260) is published monthly, except July and August, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238; periodicals postage paid at Englewood, New Jersey 07631-5238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to The WORD, 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
ISSN 0043-7964 www.antiochian.org.

Canada Post Publication Agreement No. 40043404
Return Canada address to American International Mail, STN A – BOX 697, Windsor ON N9A 6N4, Canada
How do we define success?

How do we define success? How do we know when our parish is succeeding? How do we evaluate the ministry of your parish? How do we know we are doing what God wants us to be doing?

For answers to these and similar questions, stay tuned to this edition of The WORD, where I hope to offer some articles, solutions, and even more questions!

Who are we? What is our mission? What are our values? What are we doing with what we know?

We are God’s own people, His holy nation, ordained in our baptism to bring the world to God and God to His world. Our mission is to love the Lord our God with our whole mind, being and soul, to share His love, taking care of His people, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we value is sharing in God’s life, free of temptation, bad choices and sin. What we are doing is gathering together in God’s name, preparing and fortifying each other to be successful in our mission. We are opening God’s house to all the people whom God calls our neighbor.

The fastest growing religious category in America is called the “Nones.” Nones are folks who identify themselves as not belonging to any religious community. Many have been baptized somewhere, but feel no responsibility to any Christian community, while others have not been initiated into any religious group. When asked, most say that they don’t know what they believe and are content not knowing. Religions are not their thing, and they are busy enough and happy enough fulfilling themselves with themselves. “Nones” are a significant and important mission field. Many of them are children of the founders of the Orthodox churches in America. Others are folks from every possible religious tradition, including none! They are important to serve because we know them to be our neighbors. They may have enough food, but they don’t know enough to be hungry for a relationship with God. They may have designer clothing, but they have no robe of light. They may not be behind bars, but they need the true freedom that comes from baptism and union with God.

Like the “nones,” many of our parishioners have been exposed to few of the scriptural messages of our faith. They are unaware of how God works in our lives and don’t know how to pray. Recognizing the needs of our parishioners, parishes and the communities in which our parishes are located, our Archdiocese has embarked on a program to reach out to the “nones” and other neighbors that God has put in our lives and in our communities. The WORD is excited about this new initiative and will work cooperatively with the parishes and Archdiocese leaders in these new efforts. Join me in praying for our leaders as we embark together in this exciting ministry and do all you can to participate and support this exciting new outreach.

Doing the outreach that God has commissioned us to do is how I define success. Seeing the parish serving God and all people is how I know the parish is succeeding. As for the judgment of God’s ministry, I’ll leave that up to God.

Bishop JOHN
In the Orthodox Christian liturgical tradition, the Antimins is among the most important liturgical adornments used in the altar during the Divine Liturgy. It is a type of icon, a rectangular cloth, traditionally sewn of either linen or silk. Beautifully embellished, it always reflects the image of Christ’s entombment, the four Evangelists and scriptural passages related to the Eucharist. A small piece of a martyr’s relic is ceremoniously and prayerfully placed into the fold of the Antimins as each one is blessed. It is an essential component without which the Holy Eucharist cannot be celebrated. This Antimins is inscribed with the text from the Holy Saturday Troparion, “The noble Joseph, taking down Thy most pure body from the tree, wrapped it in clean linen and sweet spices, and laid it in a new tomb.”

The Antimins, once properly folded, sits in the center of another slightly larger cloth called the eileton by which it is completely encased and protected. The two, which are folded in the same manner, are then placed in the center of the altar table, underneath the Gospel Book and unfolded only during the Divine Liturgy in the moments before the great entrance. After the Great Entrance, the chalice and diskos are placed on the Antimins and the Gifts (bread and wine) are consecrated. The Antimins remains unfolded until all have received Holy Communion at which time the chalice and diskos are then returned to the Table of Oblation (Prothesis). The priest must very carefully inspect the Antimins checking that no particles are left behind, on or underneath it or between the Antimins and the eileton. At the end of the liturgy, the Antimins is folded into thirds, beginning horizontally from the bottom up, and then in thirds again vertically from left to right. The same follows for the eileton. When the two are unfolded for use once again, the opened Antimins reflects creases that form the sign of the cross. A flattened natural sponge (usually natural loofah), used to collect any crumbs which might fall onto the Holy Table, is kept inside the folded Antimins.

The Antimins is consecrated and signed and/or sealed by the presiding Metropolitan. Upon the arrival of the Metropolitan to any church or monastery under his omophorion, he first enters the altar and checks the Antimins to ensure that it has been properly cared for and that it is, in fact, the one he himself issued. The Antimins and the chrism are the means by which a hierarch gives his blessing for priests to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and Holy Mysteries in his absence. It is, in fact, the only means by which a priest is authorized to conduct divine services. In the rare case that a Metropolitan were to withdraw his blessing from a priest to serve the Holy Mysteries, he would confirm that decision with the gesture of removing or retracting the Antimins and chrism.

Since the Antimins is a consecrated object of the church, it should only be handled by a vested bishop or priest and no one else. One should, at the very least, be vested in his stole (epitrachelion).

The Antimins, being a substitute for the altar table, may be used to celebrate the Eucharist even on top of an altar table that has not yet been consecrated. In emergencies, when an altar table is not available, the Antimins serves an important function in enabling Divine services to take place outside of churches or chapels. In the early church, if the priest celebrated at a consecrated altar, the sacred elements were placed only on the eileton. However, the current practice is for the priest to always use the Antimins on top of the eileton even on a consecrated altar table already housing relics.

Great care should be taken not to stain or damage the Antimins in any way including never washing or dry cleaning it. The Antimins has already been cleaned and protected against spills and stains of any kind. Should the Antimins become worn, torn or damaged, please contact the Metropolitan’s office for instructions on return and replacement protocol.

No writing or inscription should be present on the Antimins with the exception of the Metropolitan’s signature and seal signifying his blessing to his clergy to serve as well as his authority in the archdiocese entrusted to his care. The Antimins you are receiving is larger than usual in order to accommodate all sized parishes throughout archdiocese as well as the use of multiple chalices.

Each Antimins has been consecrated in the archdiocesan chapel of St. John Chrysostom and contains a relic of St. Raphael of Brooklyn. Please take this opportunity to share the meaning of this important church vessel with the faithful by showing it to them properly and referencing this letter if needed. In light of the 100th anniversary of his repose as well as his relic being placed inside the Antimins, you might encourage your parishioners to learn the Troparion to St. Raphael.

We beseech you to follow this guide carefully. We welcome any questions and encourage you to contact the Archdiocese Office for any further clarification, if needed.

May you be blessed to serve every Divine Liturgy as if it were your last.
April 30, 2015

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

For us, Orthodox Christians, this joyful proclamation of Pascha both gives meaning to our present lives and points us to the eternal joy of our own resurrection.

In our exuberance, it is easy to forget that most of our neighbors, co-workers and fellow citizens have no idea that this joy is even a possibility for them. While a great majority of Americans state their religion as Christian, only a small percentage of these self-proclaimed Christians attend a church on a regular basis. Our parish and mission cities are filled with both lapsed Christians and those who don’t believe in Christ.

You have heard me, as your Metropolitan, state on many occasions that we must work together to spread the beautiful faith that is Orthodoxy. Can we truly say we are filled with the joy of the Resurrection, but find a way to keep it to ourselves? By no means!

For this reason, I have directed the program “Becoming Truly Human” be established, so that our churches would be equipped to share the Orthodox faith effectively. Already, over forty of our parishes are in the process of running it. We want people who otherwise might have no meaningful contact with our Church to be given the opportunity to “Come and see,” as the earliest Christians said to their neighbors, inviting them to know Christ.

It is my hope that all of our communities would participate in this effort. You can begin by contacting the “Becoming Truly Human” program coordinator, Adam Roberts, adamr@antiochian.org (615-971-0000) or the program consultant, Fr. Michael Nasser, frmichaeln@gmail.com (270-823-3371).

May the light of the Empty Tomb radiate from your hearts throughout this Paschal season, and always, that we might work together to offer this joy to all around us.

Your Father in Christ,

+Metropolitan JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America

“\textit{The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch}” (Acts 11: 26)
Our lives in this modern world become so busy that we are constantly distracted from asking ourselves the fundamental questions and reflecting on the importance of their meaning in our lives. As Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory said in *The Lenten Spring*,

People feel unhappy and they don’t know why. They feel that something is wrong, but they can’t put their finger on what… They have everything, yet they want more. And when they get more, they are still left … dissatisfied. They want happiness and peace, but nothing seems to bring it. They want fulfillment, but it never seems to come. Everything is fine, and yet everything is wrong…. It is covered over by frantic activity, and endless running around…. It is drowned out by television programs and video games. But when the movement stops, and the power is turned off, and everything is quiet … then the dread sets in, and the meaninglessness of it all and the boredom and the fear. Why is this so? Because the Church tells us that we are really not at home. We are alienated and estranged from our true country. We are not with God in the land of the living. We are spiritually sick, and some of us are already dead [spiritually].

There are perhaps 60 million unchurched people in America who have not been to a church in six months. Perhaps one-half of these are individuals who previously attended a church earlier in their lives. Almost all of the “unchurched,” however, have not been exposed to the understanding of God in the Orthodox Church, which has preserved the apostolic doctrine handed to the Apostles from Christ Himself. While our Archdiocesan churches have always been open to those who find their way to us, few of our parishes have undertaken efforts to seek out those around us who hunger and thirst for the Orthodox Faith, whether they realize their hunger or not.

Under the leadership of Metropolitan JOSEPH, who wants our neighbors to have the opportunity to receive the blessings of Orthodoxy that we enjoy, our Archdiocese is making a new effort to that end. The idea originated in 2009, when Charles Ajalat spoke out for the need of the Church to be the Church by following our Lord’s Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations … teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you …” (Matthew 28:19–20). The laity must, under the guidance of the priest, also take this commandment to heart. St. John Chrysostom says it emphatically: “I do not believe in the salvation of anyone who does not try to save others.” As Fr. Peter Gillquist of blessed memory said, too: “You don’t have to be a gifted evangelist to take part in being an effective witness for Christ.”

The “Becoming Truly Human” program offers those outside the Church a comfortable, inviting and gentle introduction to the fullness of our human lives, as offered within Orthodox Christianity. The goal of the program is to help fulfill the Great Commission according to the two Great Commandments of Christ: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Why is the course called, “Becoming Truly Human”? Aren’t we “human” now? The answer is No. We need to understand what it means to be truly a human being, made in the image of God, and to understand that the purpose of life is to have an intimate relationship with God through His Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch, on his journey to his martyrdom, begged his followers not to prevent his death, because to die and be with Christ is to live, to be truly human. It is because God created us so: “Let us make the human being in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Nicholas Cabasilas said, “To sum it up: the Savior first and alone showed to us the true human being, who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects.” St. Athanasius has said that only through Christ’s death and resurrection and our resulting re-creation, can man “become truly human.” Fr. John Behr, Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, has suggested in his speeches and work on death, that perhaps only in death are we ultimately truly human, for then we see fully the reality of God and His Kingdom.

The program runs once a week for six weeks, including a one- or two-day retreat. There is an on-site four-hour training session for those who will be administering
and helping. The course is designed not to be a burden on the parish priest, but led by local church leaders who are trusted and approved by the priest. This is a real opportunity for the priest to empower the laity while furthering the work of the Church.

The way the course is run for newcomers is based on the researched premise that people become Christians because someone they know and admire is a Christian and they want to know, therefore, what Christianity is really all about. The setting for the dinner and course is a home or inviting church hall (perhaps with candle light and a warm atmosphere) or other suitable setting. Each session of the program starts with an informal dinner, followed by a twenty-minute talk from someone speaking extemporaneously, but conveying material from a script that is provided. (Alternatively, we hope to have professionally-produced twenty-minute videos available later).

The six session topics include fundamental questions, such as, What is the purpose of life? Who is Jesus? Why did He die? and How can I have faith? After the talk there are discussion groups. Each group has a moderator, who does not have to be theologically trained, but whose role simply is to keep the discussion going and not let any one person dominate.

The program ideas were developed in 2014 by a committee co-chaired by former Chancellor Charles Ajalat and the Metropolitan's assistant, Fr. George Kevorkian. Bishop NICHOLAS served as the episcopal overseer. Fr. Ken DeVoie of the Missions and Evangelism Department wrote the first draft of the materials. The program was then transferred from the Department to be directly under the Metropolitan. It was funded for the first two years by the Orthodox Vision Foundation and the Archdiocese.

Although initiated in the Archdiocese, the hope is that, under the Metropolitan. It was funded for the first two years by the Orthodox Vision Foundation and the Archdiocese. Although initiated in the Archdiocese, the hope is that, after an experimental and refining stage, the program will spread to all Orthodox jurisdictions in this country and elsewhere.

“Becoming Truly Human” is a vehicle to share the Orthodox Christian view of life with others, while revitalizing the faith of parishioners. The “Becoming Truly Human” course is not a catechetical course, but an evangelistic one. The ultimate goal is that many of the newcomers taking the course may go on to an inquirer’s course or catechetical course under the priest. Thus they may begin the transformation of their own lives, becoming committed chrismated or baptized Orthodox Christians.

The course is now being given experimentally in 14 Antiochian parishes, with another 27-plus planning on beginning the course between now and the end of September. These over 40 churches include large parishes, small parishes and missions, “cradle” and “convert” parishes, churches in each diocese and churches (so far) from 23 states and provinces.

All of the courses, except one, are in Phase 1 – the running of the course among existing parishioners internally in the parish so that they might not only be revitalized themselves, but feel comfortable inviting friends, business acquaintances and unchurched family members to Phase 2. So far, the courses generally have been enthusiastically received. One church, having finished Phase 1, has started Phase 2 with college students. This version of the course is for those from beyond the parish who might be interested in exploring Christianity. After that group’s first session, all the comments were positive. One person stated, “There aren’t many places I’ve been where I could be involved in a discussion like this.”

His comment points to the problems – the lack of a forum to discuss the important questions of life, and fear of “organized religion” and it shows the need for a solution like the “Becoming Truly Human” program, presented in a warm, friendly, loving environment.

The Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church jointly said in 2008, “The evangelization of God’s people, and also of those who don’t believe in Christ, constitutes the supreme duty of the Church.” Patriarch IGNATIUS said on February 6, 1987, “The Orthodox Church is not only for one nation, one civilization, one continent. It is like God Himself, for all and for every place.”

His successor, Patriarch JOHN X, made clear that evangelism or spiritual outreach is our task in this Archdiocese, and our tradition in Antioch, where they were first called Christians (Acts 11:26): “In this beloved Archdiocese, evangelism realizes a full sense of the historic missionary vocation of Antioch.” Metropolitan JOSEPH, at his enthronement, said emphatically, “I shall use this staff to proclaim the Gospel [the good news].”

But what is that “good news?” “The good news,” Fr. Keiser writes in Spread the Word, “is that Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God.” If we do not start understanding and living in the Kingdom of God now during our lifetimes, uniting both our faith and our actions, our souls may well not live in the Kingdom of God at the time of our death, when our souls leave our bodies until soul and body are reunited in the general resurrection.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ...” (Matthew 28:19–20).
How are we, as an Archdiocese, doing in fulfilling the mission of the Church in bringing the Gospel, as understood by the historic Church, to the more than sixty million unchurched in America? Unfortunately, not as well as we should be. According to the Archdiocese census information, as the best available measure of newcomers, 88 percent of our more than 275 churches and missions have four or fewer chrismations per year. There is no reason, however, why all of the top twenty churches (in terms of chrismations), if not all our churches, cannot each have thirty chrismations per year. Although increases in chrismations and baptisms of the unbaptized likely will be slower in the beginning, if God blesses the implementation of the “Becoming Truly Human” program, in 16 years the Archdiocese could double the number of its faithful. Equally, if not more importantly, if God blesses the program there will be a change in culture, so that all of the Archdiocese’s churches will be interested in evangelism or spiritual outreach, and there will be a desire on the part of all in the churches that they be warm and welcoming places for those who want to know Christ’s Church.

How can you be involved in the “Becoming Truly Human” program? 1. Pray for those administering and participating in the program; 2. Help start the program in your own parish; and 3. Donate to the “Becoming Truly Human” Evangelism Fund, by sending a check so marked, to the Antiochian Archdiocese, 358 Mountain Road, Englewood, NJ 07631. Your generous gift will help insure that the program, as blessed by God, may produce bountiful fruit. Beyond the need for resources as the program expands among the parishes, there is a need for a website, for the production and sale of materials and videos for the program, and much more.

How can your parish be involved in the “Becoming Truly Human” program? If you have the blessings of your priest, and together with him can find a potential local administrator for the program, contact the program director, Adam Roberts, adamr@antiochian.org (615-971-0000), or the program’s consultant, Fr. Michael Nasser, frmichaeln@gmail.com (270-823-3371).

Pray that the “Becoming Truly Human” program will revitalize many of the faithful and accomplish God’s will by bringing many additional new, wonderful, committed Orthodox Christians, whether originally “cradle” or converts, into His Church, so that they might have a foretaste now, and live forever, in the Kingdom of God.

Charles Ajalat, Fr. George Kevorkian, Fr. Michael Nasser and Sub-deacon Adam Roberts
### DAILY DEVOTIONS
#### AUGUST 2015
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

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### DAILY DEVOTIONS
#### SEPTEMBER 2015
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

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<td>Ephesians 1:22-2:3; Luke 3:19-22</td>
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The Word 9
When you have your wedding photo framed and hung in your home, you probably put that picture in the most expensive and stylish frame you can afford. You do not think of the cost, so much as the memory of the event it preserves and the feelings experienced. In this way, and with all family pictures, something more than paper and ink and color are present for us. It is the sacrament of the moment that counts. Material things become the conveyor or vehicle for an invisible and spiritual reality that is far more precious to us than the expense demanded to express it. Yet, if these special times in our lives are not adorned with the beauty and expense of frames and colors, we might cheapen them, and turn something that was wonderful into a common, forgettable and ordinary thing. The beauty of the material attracts us to the lasting value of the experience which that package presents.

The icons we see in Church are material things: wood, paint, lamination, and so forth. Through them, however, we find the presence of the wonder-working saint. Material things deliver the presence of the person. Our material bodies, following our baptism and chrismation, carry our immortal and beautiful soul, which is invisible to the eye. St. Paul has written of this: “Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit that is in you?” (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Do we not ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon the bread and wine and make it the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Church? Do we not need the material church in order for the priest to say those words? Is not the Church the Body of Christ? Should we not clothe the Body of Christ in beauty? Is not the vested priest the presence sacramentally of the glorified Christ when the Divine Liturgy is served? How helpful can it be to see Christ only in street clothes?

We should read the Scripture which talks about the anointing of Jesus before His Crucifixion:

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with a alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head, as he sat at table. But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me” (Matthew 26:6–11).

Did Jesus ever condemn the beauty of the Temple or comment on the wealth it contained? No, He knew that the beauty of the material Temple produces the presence of heavenly worship. He even praised the poor widow who loved God so much in His material sanctuary that she gave all her money to keep it beautiful: “He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she has’” (Luke 2:1–4).

When the Hebrew slaves left Egypt following the plagues, the Egyptians gave them enormous wealth – as though paying them reparations for all the slave labor that built the pharaohs’ monuments. “Speak now in the hearing of the people that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold” (Exodus 11:2). We know that this wealth was used exclusively for the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and for the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat and the furnishings of the Tabernacle. (See Exodus 25:1–9, the rest of Chapter 25, and all of Chapters 26–31.) See Exodus 35 and 36 for the generosity and expense of the Old Testament Tabernacle, and how the people understood the purpose of their private wealth: it was for sacred and public worship! The building of Solomon’s Temple in the books of Kings also makes this point.

Finally, the depiction of paradise after the Second Coming of Christ in the Book of Revelation describes the beauty of the New Jerusalem – in which we participate already here, in anticipation, in the Church, the Kingdom of God on earth, according to our theology (Revelation 21:9–21).

If we are receiving for dinner the most important person we know, the person we love and need the most, wouldn’t we put out our best china, utensils and tablecloth, and seat them at the polished dining room table, if we could? Don’t we want to give Jesus our Savior, who comes to visit us in His Church and to give us His Holy Body and Blood, the best we have, our very best? It cost Him everything He is to save us. Should it not cost us something – much less than He gave for us – to receive Him? Doesn’t love demand that?
Metropolitan JOSEPH dedicated 2015 to the Jubilee of St. Raphael

2015 is an historic year in the life of our God-protected Archdiocese. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the falling-asleep of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, as well as the 120th anniversary of our Mother Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn and, therefore, our Antiochian presence on these blessed shores.

Our father in Christ, Patriarch JOHN X, inaugurated this jubilee year during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn on December 7th. Throughout 2015, we will mark this anniversary at various places and locations, including, but not limited to, the Antiochian Village, St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York, the Archdiocese Convention in Boston, and St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. Likewise, the theme of our Convention and parish life conferences, as well as the various festivals and contests is centered on this “good shepherd of the lost sheep in America.”

In addition to these Archdiocesan events, Metropolitan JOSEPH has directed that each pastor and parish incorporate this jubilee year and highlight the life and legacy of St. Raphael in their divine services, sermons, retreats and bulletins, as well as other community and social events, like church festivals. There are already a variety of resources available at antiochian.org/straphaelofbrooklyn to help with this, including a downloadable version of the official logo.

The WORD will publish some documents highlighting this celebration. The following is the first of this series.

General Assessment Of the Orthodox Syrian Diocese of the Year 1914

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

By the grace of God and the intercession of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, we are pleased to present to English readers, for the first time, a list of the Orthodox churches of the “Syrian Orthodox Diocese” that were founded by the end of the year 1914. This list was documented by Archdeacon Emmanuel Abo-Hatab, who published it in The WORD magazine in February 1915, just before the repose of St. Raphael Hawaweeny, Bishop of Brooklyn.

The list represents an important historical document of the beginning of the churches that were the nucleus of the later Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. The names of streets, and of priests and societies have been translated into English to the best of our knowledge. The explanatory footnotes were added by the translator.

We hope that every parish mentioned here will find accurate information about its beginning and history, for the glory of God who glorified His saint, Raphael Hawaweeny, the founder of this Archdiocese.
GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE ORTHODOX SYRIAN DIOCESE OF THE YEAR 1914

(From The Word, Issue 2, February 1, 1915 [Year 11], pp. 80–100)

Following the order of His Grace, the Founder of this magazine and the Primate of this Diocese, and according to the custom followed by the magazine from its establishment to the present, we publish a General Assessment of the Syrian Orthodox Diocese of Brooklyn for the year 1914 that has just passed. What we have published below is based on the documents sent to us by each ecclesiastical pastoral center describing the status of the churches, congregations, and societies in each place where an official body was organized under the leadership of His Grace. The negotiations and correspondence that took place last year with the Diocese Headquarters and the reviewing of the Diocese registries helped us in determining the factuality of the information below. The purpose of publishing this General Assessment is to declare and bring to light what was achieved through the effect of the devotional ardor and the national zeal in a foreign land to which we had immigrated and which we have adopted as a new homeland, adorning it with the religious emotions that we brought from our old homeland as a gift from our fathers and ancestors.

Everyone who looks at this assessment will find that, during the last year, the Orthodox Diocese of Brooklyn has achieved in a brilliant fashion a long course of development and progress. All of this was accomplished by the pastoral labors of His Grace, the Founder and Head of the Diocese, in a way that lets one raise his head high with honor and makes the soul proud with appreciation and gratitude. As a proof of what we say, we will identify the churches that make up this Diocese, showing their number and status along with the clergy that minister to them and the societies that manage them financially. By church we mean the building that a group of the Syrian Orthodox1 attend for public prayer, whether this building was built as a church or as a house being used as a church. Also, we mean by church the group of believers whose hearts were harmonized in union to adopt a place when needed for the sake of public worship, in the hope of having an official church building in due time. For this reason we divide our listing of the churches into categories:

First: The churches that were completely consecrated;
Second: The churches that have no debts;
Third: The churches whose purchase price is not yet paid in full and are still in debt;
Fourth: The churches existing in rented houses;
Fifth: The churches that are composed of congregations of faithful who owned properties for the building of churches;
Sixth: The temporarily consecrated churches, where an itinerant priest conducts the divine services; and
Seventh: The societies that were founded in order to own churches and find priests to serve them.

FIRST: THE CHURCHES THAT WERE COMPLETELY CONSECRATED

“The churches that were completely consecrated” means those which were originally built as churches and have the shape of Orthodox churches, have no debts whatsoever, were dedicated for the worship of God, and therefore, must never be sold or abandoned. There are four churches in the Diocese of Brooklyn.

1. St. Nicholas Cathedral Church in Brooklyn, New York

With the approval and appointment by the Holy Russian Synod in St. Petersburg [Russia], this church was started in 1895 in a rented place on Washington Street in New York, when Archimandrite Raphael Hawaweeny came to New York, invited by his Orthodox Syrian compatriots. His Holiness the Archimandrite was sensitive to the congregation’s need of an officially assigned church, so he sought and strove and traveled in the United States, Canada and Mexico, collecting the funds to accomplish this project until it was done as he desired. He bought the Protestant Lutheran church located at 301–303 Pacific Street in Brooklyn. This church was later renovated inside and out and given the shape of an Orthodox church over a period of time. In 1904 this church became the Cathedral of the Diocese of Brooklyn when its priest, Father Raphael, was ordained as the Bishop of Brooklyn, and it was officially consecrated. It is the first fruit of all churches of the Orthodox Syrian churches in America. Its price was $30,000, of which the church now owes only $574.94.

There is a house for the congregation that belongs to the church, located adjacent to it, which was obtained in 1911. Its price was $16,000 and a debt of $9,736 remains.

There is also a cemetery that belongs to the church and has 150 graves. It was obtained in 1900 and 1908, and its price was $1,500 without any debt.

Also an English-language Sunday School, founded in 1907, belongs to the church. Here 108 youths of the church receive the fundamentals of the Orthodox religion in English. The Sunday School is flourishing brilliantly under the direction of Father Nathaniel Irvine with the help of his wife and of Ms. Rosa Hawaweeny.
The church has a committee called the “Parish Committee” that was elected last year on March 12/25.

The clergy of the Church are the following:

His Grace Raphael Hawaweeny from Damascus, Syria, Bishop of Brooklyn and Director of the Syrian Orthodox Mission in all North America;

Protopresbyter Basilios Kherbawey from Tyre [Lebanon];

Priest Nathaniel Irvine from Kenmare, Ireland;

Archdeacon Emmanuel Abo-Hatab from Damascus, Syria.

The membership of the Church exceeds 4,000 souls.

2. The Church of the Dormition of our Lady the Theotokos in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

The church was opened in 1904 in a rented place. Before 1905 had passed, however, the congregation had bought a piece of land to build a church and a house for the parish. It was done as the parish desired and the church was built in 1909 at the intersection of High and McCarragher Streets at a cost of $5,200. This was paid off in 1911 with the presence of the Most Honorable His Grace, the Head of the Diocese, who consecrated it completely at that time. It was the second Syrian Orthodox church in Northern America that was consecrated completely.

The house for the parish that belongs to the church was built in 1910 at a cost of $3,300, of which $2,100 was paid, with a remaining debt of $1,200 that, one hopes, will soon be paid.

There is also a cemetery that belongs to the church. Its cost is $1,500, of which $300 was paid, and a debt of $1,200 remains. The cemetery is as large as five lots and it was purchased in 1914.

There is a school that belongs to the church, opened in 1910, at which 50 students learn the fundamentals of our religion and the Arabic language and church chanting, under the care of the reverend priest of the parish.

The church has a society called “The Society of the Dormition of our Lady the Theotokos” that was founded in 1905.

The parish priest is Father Yusuf Elia from Tripoli, Syria.

3. St. Michael the Archangel Church in Beaumont, Texas

The Syrian Orthodox parish in Beaumont, Texas, constructed the church in 1908, located at the intersection of Ewing and Evalon Streets on a lot 40 feet long and 30 feet wide. Its cost was $3,000, with no debt. Since this church is built and has no debt, His Grace, the Head of the Diocese, has consecrated it completely on February 16, 1914 (Eastern calendar).

There is a cemetery that belongs to the church and was acquired in 1909 and 1911. It is 150 feet long and 100 feet wide, and its price was $400, which was paid in full.

The church has a society called “The Society of St. Michael the Archangel Church in Beaumont, Texas” that was created in 1906.

The parish priest is Father Constantine Doumani from Damascus, Syria.

Its membership exceeds 350, of which more than 250 reside in Beaumont and the rest in its vicinity.

4. St. George Church in Michigan City, Indiana

This church was established in 1911 when it was built at the intersection of Holiday and Kreiss Streets. It is 45 feet long and 25 feet wide. Its cost was $2,900, which was paid in full, leaving no debt. When His Grace, the Head of the Diocese, arrived in the city on his pastoral visit in August, he consecrated this church completely on August 24, 1914, so it was the fourth of the Syrian Orthodox churches in the Diocese that were consecrated completely.

The church has a society called “The Society of St. George,” that was founded in 1910.

The parish priest is Father Antonios Abo-Allam from Firze [Lebanon].

The membership of the church is 60.

SECOND: THE CHURCHES THAT HAVE NO DEBTS

These are churches that were originally houses and were changed into churches. Their costs were paid in full, but their appearance requires replacing them with more splendid and beautiful ones; or the current situation requires waiting till they are consecrated completely. These churches are five.

5. St. George Church in Worcester, Massachusetts

This church was opened in a rented place in 1902. Then in 1906 the zeal of the parishioners lead to the purchase of a house, numbered 100, on Wall Street, and it was converted into a church 70 feet long and 50 feet wide. Its price was $4,500, which was paid in full with no remaining debt. There is a new effort, however, to build a larger church in the place of the current one, which is not too great a task for this parish’s piety and zeal.

There is a two-story house and a shop that belong to the church.
The church has a society called “The Parish Committee,” which was created in 1905. It is engaged in building a new church today, and in the establishment of an Arabic school and a cemetery. There is another society, “The Syrian Charity Garden Society,” for women in Worcester.

The parish priest is Father Michael Al Hussan from Aitha Al Fakhar [Lebanon].

The membership of the church exceeds 1,000.

6. St. George Church in Kearney, Nebraska

This church was founded in 1903 in a rented place located at the corner of the 15th Street and Avenue G. In 1904 this house was purchased and converted into a church 50 feet long and 30 feet wide. Its price was $2,000 and was paid in full, with no remaining debt. There is now a new endeavor to demolish this wooden church and construct a new church built of solid stone. May God grant the fulfillment of these hopes!

There is a 50-foot long cemetery acquired by the church in 1905 for the price of $80, paid in full.

The church has a society called “The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society” that was founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Nicholas Yanni from Fih (Koura) [Lebanon].

The membership of the church is 270, of which 250 reside in Kearney and the rest in its vicinity.

7. St. George Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

In 1908 the Syrian Orthodox parish opened a house in Grand Rapids, Michigan, located at 61 William Street, and converted it into a church 50 feet long and 25 feet wide. Its price of $5,000 was paid in full, and the church has no debt. The parish, however, is now undertaking a plan to demolish the building and construct a beautiful new church in its place. May God grant the fulfillment of their hopes!

There is a school that belongs to the church, where Doctor Salim Ephraim Al-Ghareeb teaches 45 boys and girls the basic Arabic reading and Christian teachings and chanting. It was opened in 1914.

The church has a society called “The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society” that was founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Philip Abo-Assaly Shaheen from Rashia [Lebanon].

The number of the parishioners in the city is 400.

8. St. John of Damascus Church in Boston, Massachusetts

This church was opened in 1909 in a rented place. In 1911, however, the members of The St. John of Damascus Society purchased a house located at 68 Hudson Street and converted it into a church 29 feet long and 22 feet wide. The cost of $5,000 was paid in full and the church has no debt. The plan of the Society today is to demolish the church building and build a magnificent church in its place, hoping that it can be accomplished sometime soon, God willing!

A school for boys and girls belongs to the church and was founded in 1913. The parish priest, along with the help of Hanna Ghalieh and Ms. Mary Shamieh, teaches 150 students the elementary level classes.

The church has a society called “The St. John of Damascus Society in Boston, Massachusetts,” which was founded in 1907. Its purpose is to take care of the church affairs. There are also four charitable groups that belong to it. They are the following:

“The St. George Society for Burials,” founded in 1912 for the purpose of providing and caring for a cemetery;

“The Spiritual Union Society,” founded in 1913;

“The Girls Awakening Society,” for young women, founded in 1914; and

“The Virgin Mary Society,” for ladies, founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Suleiman Fernini from Damascus, Syria.

The membership of the church is 1,050, of which 800 reside in Boston and 250 in its vicinity.

9. St. Simeon the Stylite Church in Ironwood, Michigan

In 1910 the pious parishioners in Ironwood moved and constructed a church located on Maple Street. All its expenses, $3,500, were paid in full. The church is 60 feet long and 24 feet wide.

The church has a society called “The St. Simeon the Stylite Society,” which was founded in 1910.

The parish priest, Father Eliah Hamati from Nazareth [Israel], served until July and resigned from its pastoral care, leaving the church without a priest.

THIRD: THE CHURCHES THAT ARE STILL IN DEBT

These are the churches which were constructed as churches, or were owned as houses that were converted into churches, and their cost has not yet been paid in
full. They are eleven churches.

10. St. Nicholas Church of Canada in Montreal, Canada

In 1899 the Syrian Orthodox congregation in Montreal, Canada, opened a church in a place rented for this purpose. Then in 1909 the Charitable Syrian Orthodox Society purchased a house in the city at 348 East Notre Dame Street. It was demolished and a new church was constructed. The church is 100 feet long and 30 feet wide. Its cost is $30,000, of which $23,000 was paid, leaving a $7,000 debt.

A small school belongs to the church where the parish priest teaches 10 boys the fundamentals of Arabic language only.

The church has a society for men called “The Charitable Syrian Orthodox Society,” which was founded in 1905. There is also a society for the ladies called “The Ladies’ Flower Charity,” founded in 1908.

The parish priest is Father Agapios Gholam from Beirut [Lebanon].

The membership of the church is 500, of which 250 reside in Montreal, Canada, and the rest in its vicinity.

11. St. George Church in Boston, Massachusetts

This church was opened in 1900 when the parish rented a house located at 32 Hudson Street and converted one of its stories into a church. The parish priest had previously owned this house, and it was purchased for $5,000, of which $2,500 was paid, leaving a debt of $2,500.

The parish priest is Father Gerges (George) Daou Al-Maalouf from Deir Al-Ghazal [Lebanon].

12. St. George Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts

This church was opened in 1904 in a rented place. Then in 1906 the parish purchased a house and demolished it and in its place built a church in 1910 located at 302 Elm Street. Its price was $4,674, of which $2,974 was paid, leaving a debt of $1,700.

The church has a society called “The St. George Society,” that was founded in 1906.

There is also a society called “The Syrian Girls’ Society,” founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Elias Freigi from Kab Elias [Lebanon].

13. The Dormition of the Lady Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania

In 1906 a place was rented in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, for the conduct of divine services. Then the parish felt the need for a church dedicated for this purpose. A piece of land was purchased in 1910 and a church was built, 70 feet long and 30 feet wide, located at 305 Chestnut Street. Its price at the end of 1914 was $17,325, of which $4,750 remains as debt which, it is hoped, will be paid off soon, God willing!

A daily school belonging to the church was opened in 1912. Here the parish priest teaches, along with Jamila Dawood Abboud and Katrin Al-Khouri Saba, every day from morning till night, the fundamentals of Arabic and English, and of the Christian teaching and mathematics. The number of students, both boys and girls, is 40.

A cemetery belonging to the church is 40 feet long and 30 feet wide. It was acquired in 1905 at the price of $375, which was paid in full.

Also, the church possesses an adjacent parish house, where the priest dwells. Its price was $4,000, of which $1,300 was paid, leaving a debt of $2,700.

The church has a society called “The Charitable Syrian Orthodox Society,” that was founded in 1905.

The parish priest is Father Michael Saba from Afsadeek (Koura).

The membership of the church is composed of 180 residing in Johnstown, and 25 in its vicinity.


The church was opened in 1906 in a rented place. In 1911, however, the parishioners purchased a house located at 55 Main Street and converted one of its stories into a church. The price was $4,000, of which $2,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $2,000.

The church has a society called “The St. George Society,” founded in 1911.

The parish priest is Father Alexi Hanna from Al-Malki (Matyn Arnouk) [Syria].

15. St. Nicholas Church of Montreal in Montreal, Canada

In 1908 the parish committee in Montreal, Canada, rented a place and converted it into a church. It purchased a place in 1909 where it built a church that was completed in 1911, located at 190 Vitra Street. Its price was $17,000, of which $10,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $7,000.

The parish priest is Archimandrite Athimios Ofesh from Al-Muhaidsee [Lebanon].
16. St. George Church in Vicksburg, Mississippi
This church was opened in 1908 in a rented place. Then a piece of land located on Washington Street in the southwest was purchased in 1913, on which a church was built. It is 100 feet long and 40 feet wide. Its price was $3,000, of which $1,500 was paid, leaving a debt of $1,500.

A priest house belonging to the church was built in 1914. Its price was $1,000, which was registered as a debt of the church. So its total debt is $2,500.

The church has a society called “The St. George Committee,” which was founded in 1912.

The parish priest is Father Macarius Al-Saifi from Beshmazin (Koura).

The membership of the church is 100 souls.

17. St. George Church in Charleston, West Virginia
In 1911 a house, located at the intersection of Court and State Streets, was purchased and it was converted into a church that is 46 feet long and 32 feet wide. Its price was $10,000, of which $7,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $3,000 that, it is hoped, will be paid off soon in order to fulfill the wish of the parish to have an official church in place of the present one.

A school for boys and girls belongs to the church, where the reverend parish priest teaches 60 students the fundamentals of the Arabic language and the Christian teaching and church chanting.

The church has a society called “The St. George Society in Charleston, West Virginia,” that was formed in 1911.

“The Syrian Girls’ Society” belongs to the church and was formed in 1913.

The parish priest is Father Elia Al-Hamati from Nazareth [Israel].

The membership of the church exceeds 450, of which 320 reside in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the rest in its vicinity.

18. St. Elias Church in La Crosse, Wisconsin
This church was built in 1912 by the zeal and piety of the parishioners in this city, and it is located at 714 Mill Street. The price was $2,000, of which $1,500 was paid, leaving a debt of $500.

The church has a society called “The St. Elias the Prophet Society,” which was founded in 1908. There is no particular priest for it right now.

19. St. George Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
In mid-1914, the Syrian Orthodox in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, moved with a thankful zeal to build a temple to God, and it was done according to their will in a short time. Before five months had passed, the St. George Syrian Orthodox Church, a stone building 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, was completed at 17 East Avenue. Its cost was $9,000, of which $5,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $4,000.

A house for the priest belongs to the church and its price was included in the church's price.

Also a cemetery, 800 feet long and 300 feet wide, belongs to the church, and its price was $275, with no debt.

The church has a society called “The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society,” which was founded in 1914.

It also has a society for the ladies called “The Relief Light Society,” which was founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Gerges Michael Al-Nakt from Fih (Koura).

The membership of the church is 150, of which 100 reside in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the rest in its vicinity.

20. St. Michael Church in Monessen, Pennsylvania
During 1914 the zeal of the Syrian Orthodox in Monessen, Pennsylvania, moved them to build a house for God. The fruit of that zeal is a new church, 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, built at 512 9th Street. The church is built of wood and its price is $8,208.30 of which $2,638.78 was paid, leaving a debt of $5,569.25.

The church has a society called “The Society of St. Michael Church in Monessen, Pennsylvania,” which was founded in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Gerges Michael Al-Nakt from Fih (Koura).

The membership of the church is 250, of which 50 reside in its center and the rest in its vicinity.

FOURTH: THE CHURCHES THAT EXIST IN RENTED HOUSES
These are the places that are rented by the parishioners to conduct services because they are not yet able to own a place for this purpose. It is hoped, however, that these rented churches will be converted into churches owned by their faithful with the help of God and His generosity. The number of these churches is seven.

21. St. George Church in Washington, D.C.
This church was opened in 1909 in a rented house located at 643 Louisiana Avenue (on the northwest side). The congregation agreed on the necessity of owning a church
there, and an effort is being made to choose the proper location. The result will appear soon, God willing!

The church has a society called “The St. George Society in Washington, D.C.,” which was formed in 1912.

The parish priest is Father Ayoub Gerges Salloum from Kafr Saron (Koura).

The membership of the church exceeds 150.

22. St. George Church in Mexico City, Mexico

This church was opened in 1909 in Mexico City, Mexico, in a rented place.

The parish priest is Father Ayoub Gerges Salloum from Kafr Saron (Koura).

The membership of the church exceeds 150.

23. St. George Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

This church was opened in 1912 in a rented house, but the parishioners purchased a house in 1912 in order to convert it into a church. The price was $9,000, of which $3,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $6,000.

The parish priest in the first half of the year was Father Gerges Michael Al-Nakt, who resigned, and the parish is without a priest.


In 1912 the Syrian Orthodox in Geneva, New York, rented a house located at 51 Geneva Street and devoted it to the conducted of the divine services. There are plans, however, to acquire a church building. May God grant these wishes!

The parish priest is Father Daniel Tannous Gerges from Matyn Arnouk.

The membership of the church in Geneva and its vicinity is 120.

25. St. George Church in Macon City, Mississippi

This church was opened in 1913 in a rented house.

The church has a society called “The St. George Society,” that was founded in 1913.

The parish priest is Father Mousa Abo-Hayder from Baskenta (Lebanon).

26. St. George Church in Utica, New York

In 1913, Reverend Father Gerges Abo-Trad came to this country, and the Syrian community in Utica, New York, opened a church in a rented place so that Father Gerges could conduct the Divine Liturgy. He left the United States, however, in the same year. Still, in the middle of 1914, the parish started to conduct its services again at the house of one of its members, Mr. Daoud Tabshary, located at 906 Mohawk Street. Efforts are being made to purchase a church.

The church has a society called “The Parish Committee,” that was formed in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Gerges Michael Al-Nakt, who resigned, and the parish is without a priest.

27. St. George Church in New Kensington, Pennsylvania

This church was opened in 1913, and the Syrian community in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, and they formed a society that rented a house devoted to prayer. Efforts are being made to own a church devoted to the parish.

The church has a society called “The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society,” that was formed in 1914.

The parish priest is Father Suleiman Merhej from Al-Shouair (Lebanon).

The membership of the church exceeds 70.

FIFTH: PROPERTIES THAT ARE OWNED FOR FUTURE CHURCHES

These are the congregations that are formed by love and are living churches of God, and that own properties on which to build churches. There are three.

28. St. George Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

This church was opened in a rented house, but the parishioners purchased a house in 1912 in order to convert it into a church. The price was $9,000, of which $3,000 was paid, leaving a debt of $6,000.

The parish priest in the first half of the year was Father Gerges Michael Al-Nakt, who resigned, and the parish is without a priest.

29. St. George Church in Chicago, Illinois

This church was opened in 1908 in a rented place. Then the parishioners acquired a piece of land for building a church, at the price of $600 that was paid in full.

The church has a society called “The St. George Syrian Orthodox Society,” that was founded in 1912.

In the first half of the year Father Seraphim Nassar was serving and was being considered the parish priest. He left the parish, however, and it remains without a priest.

30. St. George Church in Toledo, Ohio

In 1914, an official committee from the parishioners was formed and acquired a piece of land to build a church. It entered into discussions with Mr. Suleiman Boulos (Paul) in Montreal, Canada, through His Grace, the Head of the Diocese, who ordained Suleiman a deacon and prepared him to be the parish priest in Toledo, Ohio.
The church has a society called “The St. George Society,” that was founded in 1914.

The number of parishioners is close to 400.

**SIXTH: THE TRAVELING CHURCHES**

These are places which an itinerant priest prepares as a temporary church where he conducts the divine services on the Holy Antiminsion after sprinkling the place with the holy water. During the last year, there was more than one priest traveling. At the end of the year, however, only one itinerant priest remained: Father Seraphim Nassar from Merseen [Lebanon].

Since the end of 1914 (Eastern Calendar), the delegated commissioner of the parishioners in Toledo, Ohio, continued to be Deacon Suleiman Boulos (Paul).

**SEVENTH: THE SOCIETIES**

These are the groups that were formed for building churches, and they are composed of the people who chose to join them. God willing, the churches will be converted into consecrated churches soon. There are two.

1. **The Syrian Orthodox Charitable Society in Pawtucket and Central Falls, Rhode Island**

This society was founded in 1910. Its purpose is the building of a church and the finding of a parish priest. It acquired a house at 110 Washington Street in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

The society has a branch for ladies that was founded in 1913.

2. **The St. George Society in Birmingham, Alabama**

This society was founded in 1914 and its purpose is to bring parishioners together and to acquire both a church and a priest.

This is the General Assessment of the Syrian Orthodox Diocese of Brooklyn that we gladly present to the Syrian Orthodox people across North America so that they may see how much the Diocese has advanced from its previous year (1913) under the care of its Most Honorable Head and with the efforts of its reverend pastors and the ardent piety of its children. Our purpose for this presentation, in addition to offering praise and thanksgiving to God, from Whom every help and relief comes down, is to support the resolve of everyone who has worked and labored, and to motivate those who have not yet labored with us.

Everyone who looks at this Assessment will find that the churches have increased in 1914 by two more official churches than the previous year, and by another three, which are the living churches in the hearts of the congregations that were formed to acquire properties and to construct churches of their own. So the number of the churches grew to 30. The total debt that these churches have exceeds $65,000.

The number of the societies that are formed within these churches is 37. The number of schools that belong to these churches is eight. The number of clergy that serve this Diocese is 29, of whom there is 1 bishop, 1 archdeacon, and 1 deacon, and 26 priests (17 married, 3 widowers, and 6 celibate), including 1 Archimandrite, 1 Archpriest and 24 priests.

We supplicate our Almighty God, with the blessing of His Most Honorable, the Head of the Diocese, that it will flourish and shine with prosperity and increase in strength and growth for the Glory of His Most Holy Name and for the splendor of the Faith.

The Syrian Orthodox Office
Brooklyn, New York
Archdeacon Emmanuel Abo-Hatab

**FOOTNOTES**

1. **Translator:** Most of the societies mentioned here were groups that had various functions, and not one in particular. For this reason we prefer to use the word “society” instead of “committee,” unless otherwise indicated.

2. **Translator:** By “Syrian Orthodox” is meant all the Orthodox who emigrated from the Historic Greater Syria (the Fertile Crescent), which includes mainly today’s Syria (in the most part), Lebanon, Israel and the West Bank, Jordan and Iraq. It is not to be confused with the Syriac Orthodox.

3. **Translator:** According to the Julian and Gregorian Calendars.

4. **Editor:** There were two St. Nicholas Churches built in Montreal about the same time (see item 10, above). One was incorporated under the auspices of the Province of Quebec, and the other under those of the Government of Canada. One was later re-named St. George Church.
Some Words about the Cross of Christ in Our Lives

by Fr. Michael Koblosh

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

(2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

One must tread lightly when talking about the Cross and what it might mean. The saying “less is more” is never truer than when one speaks of the Cross, for it is at the Cross – at the breakpoint – that God connects with us once and for all.

A MOTHER DYING

Here is a true story: a phone call from a young man to a young priest. The man’s wife, 27, mother of two small children, is dying in the hospital – and would I, the young priest, go to see her?

Yes, of course. But as I hang up the receiver, feelings of inadequacy begin to overtake me. What can I possibly say to this woman? What word can be offered that would not sound pat, “religious,” artificial? How could I even begin to understand the depth of her fate, of her fear, of her suffering? “Lord,” I pray, “I don’t know what to say. Help me find and speak some small word, assuring this woman of Your presence and love.”

But, as the saying goes, “Man proposes, God disposes.” God has His own ideas, His own way.

A hospital room, a young woman dying, an uncertain priest – a priest who has resolved to let her talk and, perhaps pray some psalms with her. “How are you?” he says, to start the conversation. A short pause. Then, from her lips begin to flow words, words of transforming power. “Thank you for coming, Father,” she said. “I am dying, but my heart overflows with joy and gratitude that He has allowed me to witness to His love. I have come to know what His cross means and I am so happy to be a part of that. He loves me and has forgiven me everything, and I know that He will take me to Himself and that He will watch over my husband and my children. I would have loved to have seen them grow up, marry, and to have seen my grandchildren. But He has given me another way, a better way, and my soul is filled with thanksgiving and joy, and I accept His ways.”

Later, going down in the elevator was like going down from the top of the mountain. The priest’s heart is filled with joy and repentance, with tears of gratitude, of humility and amazement, of tender love for everyone and everything. Lord, when we meet You, how simple, beautiful and natural everything is, so filled with radiance. And how difficult and complicated it becomes when we fall into our sins and, without even realizing it, run to hide from Your face. But when we meet You, something in us is broken, something dies. All that seemed so important becomes so meaningless, so external, so nothing before You. “For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God … Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you…” (Colossians 3:3ff.).

Jesus comes to us at the breaking point, at the Cross,
at the place of pain that so desperately needs healing, yet which we seek so desperately to hide from Him. It is easy to be religious, but how difficult it is to accept His healing power and be healthy. “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

**A RUSSIAN WOMAN ON HER KNEES IN PRAYER**

Another story: Russia, 1984, Zagorsk, Holy Trinity Monastery; Russian Orthodoxy in all her mystical and spiritual power. It is pre-perestroika, and Orthodox Russia is still nailed to her cross. It is evening and hundreds of fellow Orthodox brethren are milling about the church, venerating icons and relics, lighting candles, praying… An overwhelming impression of people confessing Christ and continuing to believe in Him even in persecution and in the degrading harassment and disdain they must suffer daily for their faithfulness. From among the crowd, a woman falls to her knees and quietly but audibly utters, “Gospodi! – O Lord!” A moment, split second, a prayer heard hundreds – thousands – of times. But never like this, for it came from somewhere in the very depths of her soul, from the marrow of her bones, from the very pain of her suffering. I don’t know what her story was, but the power of her prayer seemed to embrace all the suffering, all that river of blood, all that ocean of tears, of fear, of terror, of pain. For me, it embraced as well the memory of my parents, of my immigrant ancestors, and many of those immigrant “old-timers” who peopled my childhood. There was a time when their world was young and full of hopes for themselves and their children. With what dignity, patience, endurance they bore their difficulties, their fears, their sufferings, and their sorrows. An undefinable quality of peacefulness, of “joy-producing” sorrow is their legacy, a quality sometimes radiating from old icons and recognized in the lives of people one meets in life. And it is a quality whose absence leaves everything superficial, dull and lifeless. “O Lord!” At Zagorsk, I was at “home.” I was always there, even from childhood.

**SHARING IN HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH**

Jesus was crucified and died on the Cross. They took His body, wrapped it and placed it in a tomb and went home, for it was the Sabbath. But from that time till now, something is happening, some great transforming power is restoring a great peace in the hearts of men and women. The Church still wends her way through history and is often covered with blood, tears and humiliation. But the miracle of her life is that she knows – knows in a way past all understanding – that the blood, suffering, humiliation and tears are the Lord’s own. It is the sharing in His suffering and death that is the source of her power and of her peace. It is there that He meets her most totally, most completely. “Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world!” The transforming, resurrecting power of Christ’s Cross and “life-creating” death is being worked out all around us, if we but have eyes that see and ears that hear.

“Why are you weeping?” said the angel to the woman who came to complete the burial of the Lord. Why are you weeping, what is your problem? Everything is forgiven, and He has taken to Himself all the tears, all the blood, all the sorrow, all the fear, all the sickness, all the defeat, and the deaths of each and everyone of us – and He has filled it all with His peace, His joy, and most of all, His boundless, bottomless all-forgiving love. Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, for I have seen your salvation – a light which penetrates even the darkest pit of my soul, washing it in blood, and flooding it with Your inexpressible love, a love that is infinitely more powerful than death. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

**EDITOR’S NOTE**

The “editor’s notes” that were included in the Palestine, Israel and the BDS movement article last month by Anne Glynn Mackoul were written by someone who helps me (Bishop JOHN) with editing but got by me. It is my hope to avoid any political statements that might detract from our Orthodox mission and ministry. I apologize to Anne and the readers of The WORD for the inclusion of these notes.
The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) of the World Council of Churches, an international, inter-church advocacy initiative for peace in Israel and Palestine, invites member churches, faith-based communities and civil society organizations around the world to join together September 20 to 26, 2015, for advocacy and action in support of an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine and a just peace for all in Palestine and Israel. Congregations, individuals and groups concerned for justice are called to act to achieve justice through demonstrating commitment to create a common international public witness and to do so through nonviolence and dialogue. The theme of this World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel (WWPPI) in 2015 is “God has broken down the dividing walls.” The hashtag for our campaigns during the week is “#WallWillFall.”

World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel
Contemporary American culture is experiencing a “mindfulness” revolution. Books teaching the benefits and practice of mindfulness are increasingly popular, mindfulness-based therapy has gained wide credibility, and centers of meditation are emerging in cities across America. As mindfulness attracts more and more adherents, the Orthodox Church must come to terms with the practice and articulate a theological and pastoral response to it. Mindfulness possesses such magnetism because it fills a significant need in ourselves and in our culture, where previously little help was to be found.
The disease of our time is distractedness. Distraction cuts each person off from themselves, from others, and from God. Do you regularly attend church or say your prayers, but find your mind incessantly wandering and unable to focus on what is being prayed or done in the liturgy? Such lack of attention not only hinders one’s prayer life, but also renders one susceptible to losing control of one’s impulses. Many people overeat without really thinking about it, or express anger at their spouse or children or others in situations that are relatively insignificant. These automatic and even knee-jerk reactions are the symptoms of the deep-rooted social disease of distractedness.

There are other symptoms we are only too familiar with. Jon Kabat-Zinn – author, mindfulness guru, and founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center – reflects that “we are apt to get so caught up in the urgency of everything we have to do, and so caught up in our heads and in what we think is important, that it is easy to fall into a state of chronic tension and anxiety that continually drives our lives on automatic pilot.” Another well-known mindfulness advocate, Thich Nhat Hanh, observes that “we are not capable of being alive in the present moment. We always postpone being alive to the future, we don’t really think about it, or express anger at their spouse or children or others in situations that are relatively insignificant. These automatic and even knee-jerk reactions are the symptoms of the deep-rooted social disease of distractedness.

What is Mindfulness?

So what exactly do we mean when we speak of mindfulness? Various authors define it differently, but Jon Kabat-Zinn sums them up best: “Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” Another defines mindfulness as “the ability to stay with an object, not allowing distraction.” Mindfulness is a skill, and as with any skill, one learns to be mindful only through consistent practice over time. The means by which one achieves mindfulness is meditation, and the foundation of all meditation practice is breathing. In meditation, beginners and experts bring the full attention of their mind to their breath. They observe the air passing through the nostrils, they feel the rising and falling of the abdomen, and they are aware of the necessity of breathing for maintaining life. Inevitably, the mind will wander to something else – to the discomfort or pain they feel in their body, the list of things they have to do, or a song they recently heard. When this happens, practitioners simply acknowledge the thought – without judging the thought or themselves – and then return their attention to breathing. Mindfulness of one’s breathing helps calm the body and mind, enabling one to be aware of one’s thoughts and feelings with greater equanimity and discernment.

Using the foundation of the breath, Kabat-Zinn instructs patients at his eight-week Stress Reduction Clinic in specific formal meditation practices. The fundamental practice of formal meditation is the sitting meditation: in which one sits on a floor with legs crossed or in a chair while maintaining proper posture and focusing the attention of one’s mind on the breath. The body scan is another form of meditation in which the patient lies supine and systematically brings the awareness of his or her mind to each part of the body – from the toes to the head – noting any feelings, sensations, associations, memories, or the lack thereof. A third practice used is yoga, in which attention is brought upon a series of physical postures and stretches. In all these practices, the practitioner is not trying to “get somewhere” or “do something” – this would amount to rejection of the present moment. Meditation is in fact a non-doing; it is simply being, being in the present moment.

The Benefits of Mindfulness Practice

While being fully present is the only aim in mindfulness practice, the practice of mindfulness can have profound effects on one’s body and mind. One of the most valuable things patients experience as a result of their mindfulness training is the realization that they are not their thoughts. The thoughts, feelings, and even physical sensations, like pain, that we experience are just that; they do not, as we often think, constitute who we are. So without denying one’s experience, meditation acknowledges our experience for what it is while freeing us from the distorted perceptions we create by identifying ourselves with our thoughts, feeling, or pain. But mindfulness practice also enables us to respond consciously, instead of automatically, to our thoughts, feelings, pains, and illnesses, and this has been shown to have a tremendous positive effect on one’s well being.

This has significant implications on how an individual experiences stress. Stress itself is neither inherently good nor bad, but our perception of a particular stressor makes all the difference to the amount of stress
we experience in body and mind. Too often we respond to stress automatically, with unawareness, and this only increases the amount of stress we feel, compounding simple problems into larger ones. Most of the threats we experience are not a matter of life or death, but pose a challenge to our sense of social status, of how we perceive our relationship to others: our spouse, children, co-workers, or peers. But the flight or flight response still activates in these situations, charging us with a rush of adrenaline and energy, and often we either use that energy in destructive ways – say, by lashing out in anger at someone – or we suppress those feelings, deny the problem, become engrossed in our work or busyness, or turn to food, alcohol, or other substances to provide comfort and distraction. The practice of moment-to-moment mindfulness gives us the emotional space needed to assess a threat so we can properly respond to it with calmness and control rather than automatically reacting to it. “[I]ncreasing your level of awareness … gives you a range of options for influencing what will happen next.” This enables one to choose a response that does not generate more stress, one which constructively, rather than destructively, addresses the issue.

The Roots of Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practice was not simply invented at the end of the twentieth century. Mindfulness appears to be Buddhism’s great contribution to the West; it responds to the need for stillness that is desperately lacking in a culture full of distractions. Buddhist meditation practice falls into one of two general categories: 1) samatha (tranquility meditation), in which concentration is brought to bear on a single object, and 2) vipassana (insight meditation), in which the mind is opened and awareness is directed to all that enters its sphere.10 Buddhist and secular practice often blend these two meditation forms. Advocates of mindfulness claim that it can be practiced by anyone, regardless of religious affiliation. There is even a degree of ambivalence as to whether Buddhism itself is a religion or a philosophy, and the answer may depend on which school of Buddhism one is referring to. Theravada (“The Way of the Elders” – “Orthodox” Buddhism) and some Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”) traditions like Zen are non-theistic and closely resemble a philosophy or way of life, not unlike Platonic or Aristotelian traditions in ancient Greece. Other Mahayana schools, and the Vajrayana schools (i.e., Tibetan Buddhism) exhibit strong religious and theistic practices, including use of magical incantations (as in Tantra) or prayer to deities. While all three schools have adherents in America, the practices advocated by mindfulness experts seem to draw most heavily on Theravada and Zen, that is, the more philosophical traditions. This has largely contributed to the universal appeal of mindfulness and meditation. Advocates like Kabat-Zinn claim they are not teaching a religion; they are simply showing others how to better use their mind through specific mental exercises, much as a trainer or physical therapist helps a person use their body better. But can the Orthodox Church accept these claims and practice mindfulness on its own terms? A closer look is needed to respond with discernment.

When Siddhartha Gautama – the Buddha – had his experience of Enlightenment, he did not set out to begin a new religious movement, nor did he completely discard the cosmology and anthropology of his day. His great discovery was a way out of the endless cycle of rebirth that was prominent in the cosmological and religious beliefs of his day, and this way out is achieved through the realization of the Four Noble Truths – 1) suffering exists 2) as a result of thirst or desire, 3) but the cause of suffering can be eliminated 4) by means of the Noble Eightfold Path. This path consists of right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.11 The seventh element, right mindfulness, is the focus of our discussion. For Buddhists, “Meditation is the specialized activity that helps us to fully realize the Buddha’s teachings …” in which “the mind arrives at the understanding that ‘everything that arises passes away and is not self’….”12 The ultimate purpose is to reach Nirvana, freedom from thirst and desire, thus, freedom from suffering.

The Limitations of Mindfulness

While acknowledging that mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn asserts that “it is not dependent on any belief system or ideology,”13 thus its benefits are available to all. But can mindfulness as he presents it really be practiced apart from its Buddhist worldview? Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as an act of remembering to be fully awake. “It reconnects us with what some people call “big mind,” with a mind of wholeness …. Since we are whole anyway, it’s not that we have to do anything. We just have to “re-mind” ourself of it.”14 Several issues in this statement are problematic for Orthodox Christians. What he does not tell us is that “some people” refer specifically to Buddhists, because “big mind” is a Buddhist concept. Shunryu Suzuki, the great popularizer of Zen in America, says that “in your big mind, everything has the same value. Everything is Buddha himself.”15 To have big mind is to believe that
nothing comes from outside your mind; one’s mind must encompass all things, without judgment of something as being good or evil. “Nothing outside yourself can cause any trouble. You yourself make the waves in your mind.”16 Thus mindfulness denies the existence of outside influences – demonic or holy. This is in contradiction to Nikephoros the Monk who says, “[the devil and his demons] found they could inwardly derange… anyone’s reason whenever they wanted to. The only defense against this is the ceaseless mindfulness of God.”17

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of mindfulness is that it is a non-relational activity. Kabat-Zinn claims that mindfulness produces a mind of wholeness, and then goes on to say that we are whole anyways, as we are, without doing anything. But how can any Orthodox Christian conceive of wholeness apart from Christ? Man is not a self-sufficient entity; he is created in God’s image and likeness and depends entirely on God for his being. Additionally, Kabat-Zinn says that when we see with the eyes of wholeness – when we see problems in the context of whole systems rather than in isolation – “we can perceive the intrinsic web of interconnectedness underlying our experience and merge with it.”18 This complements what the Buddha said after his enlightenment, “It is wonderful to see Buddha nature in everything and in each individual,”19 which Zen master Dogen interprets to mean “Everything is Buddha nature.”20 Buddha nature is what connects all things together; nothing exists apart from Buddha nature. It is how George Lucas describes the Force of Star Wars. It is not a personal deity, but an ever present It, and this It, this interconnectedness is what Kabat-Zinn says we are to “merge” with when we meditate.

This raises serious issues for Orthodox Christians because any idea of “I” or “you,” of personhood in man and in God, is dissolved in the sea of interconnectedness: all is one, and one is all. The notion of merging denies not only the Orthodox understanding of personhood, it denies the personal nature of God. And if there is no person and no personal God, there is, finally, no communion. The Orthodox relate to the material world, to each other, and to God through acts of communion. Each person is unique and unrepeatable, and all of creation becomes one in Christ not through some impersonal merging, but through man’s priestly role in offering all things to God in thanksgiving and worship, an offering fulfilled and perfected in Christ. Thus any attempt to integrate mindfulness and Orthodoxy undermines the central revelation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Mindfulness Redefined

We have shown that mindfulness cannot be completely accepted on its own terms, and yet we cannot completely disregard it. Something mindfulness advocates are saying is true and speaks to the great need of our time. And here it may be useful to remember St. Basil’s image of the bee that flies from flower to flower collecting only the best pollen for his needs and leaving the rest. The Orthodox Church has never rejected all knowledge found outside the Church, as can be seen in its utilization of Greek philosophy or scientific discoveries. And yet the truths we learn from outside the Church must be digested and located in the Church’s own tradition and narrative. This is no less true of mindfulness and the disease it seeks to heal, distractedness. We see in the Fathers that distraction is not a new problem. St. Gregory of Sinai calls distractive thoughts “the promptings of the demons and precursors of the passions,”21 and St. Neilos calls distraction “the cause of the intellect’s obscurcation,”22 which we shall see, cuts one off from communion with God. And when we turn to the Fathers, we see that mindfulness is not a new solution to this problem, but has existed in our Tradition from the beginning.

We must first place mindfulness – or what the Orthodox call watchfulness (nepsis), attentiveness, guarding the intellect, custody of the heart, and noetic stillness23 – in its proper context. The human person consists of a body, a soul, and a spirit or nous, often described as the intellect or mind. The nous is that part of ourselves which enables us to experience God and to know Him, not merely intellectually, but existentially. The soul is said to be incorporeal, yet it is contained in and intimately united to our body; and the nous – sometimes described as the highest part of the soul, or the eye of the soul – has its center in the heart.24 Further, the soul is composed of three parts, and the Fathers use Plato’s image of a charioteer controlling two powerful horses to describe 1) the reasoning faculty governing 2) the irascible and 3) desiring parts of the soul.25 God intended the nous to govern the soul, which itself was to govern the body, but the nous was darkened by the Fall – which ushered in sin, death, and ultimately, separation from God – and instead of governing the soul and body, it is now subject to them. The purpose of the Orthodox Church is to provide therapy for restoring the nous, soul, and body to proper order through baptism and a life of repentance, so that man may be restored to communion with God.
Evagrius and subsequent Fathers describe three stages of prayer which restore the person to God. The first stage is that of practice (praxis). This stage is carried out on the bodily level, and also corresponds to what is called the prayer of the lips. We must take time to actually say the words of the prayers, both privately and in public worship. Bodily action may accompany our prayer in the form of making the sign of the cross, bows, or prostrations. On the level of praxis, we must also subject ourselves to ascetic practices like fasting and almsgiving. Many Orthodox Christians fail to make sufficient time for praxis, and of those who do, few progress to the second stage: the prayer of the mind, or natural contemplation.

Our soul’s restoration is hindered because of a disconnection between the body and the soul – between the prayer of the lips and the prayer of the mind – and it is because of a lack of watchfulness. We attend the services and recite the prayers and hymns, but we are easily distracted, and find our minds wandering off on some spontaneous thought instead of staying with the words being said. Watchfulness or attentiveness is necessary at this stage because it “is the sign of true repentance. It is the soul’s restoration, hatred of the world, and return to God…It is serenity of intellect…the subjection of our thoughts, the palace of the mindfulness of God, the stronghold that enables us patiently to accept all that befalls.”

The purpose of the Orthodox Church is to provide therapy for restoring the nous, soul, and body to proper order through baptism and a life of repentance, so that man may be restored to communion with God.

In this way, prayer becomes “the prayer not of one faculty alone, but of the whole man, soul, spirit, and body…” This is what every Orthodox Christian, nay, what every human person is called to, because this is what we were created for in the beginning. There is no human fulfillment, no true wholeness apart from union with God.

So we see that mindfulness has an important place in the attainment of this union, but it is not an end in itself as mindfulness advocates maintain; it is a means to something much greater. One cannot truly pray without being watchful, so practice of mindfulness – as attentiveness or being focused in the present – strengthens our ability to remain free from distractions so we can focus on the “one thing needful.” To be watchful is to utilize every moment for repentance, for turning away from all distractions and sin and turning towards God. Mindfulness also helps strengthen the charioteer of reason. Stress derails the charioteer and leaves the horses of desire and anger to run out of control. When our stress levels are high, when we feel threatened by another, those are...
the breath in prayer, and attach the prayer of Jesus to their lives. We have always recognized the importance of utilizing the example of the hesychasts. We find that hesychasts for healing and restoring the soul to God, we must look to the center of Christ, and leads to union with the Father. Our churches have been no exception to the fear surrounding mindfulness and meditation, but it is time we set these fears aside and give the faithful the tools required for their spiritual journey. Meditation has a place in the Church, but there is a danger if we take our lead from the Buddhists or the secular therapists. The attempt to fuse mindfulness and Orthodoxy leads to confusion, because mindfulness is disconnected from relationship, and ultimately undermines the central dogma of our faith, the personhood of Jesus Christ.

To become wholly human is only possible as persons in communion with Jesus Christ, and this communion is expressed most fully in the Liturgy. It is the very nature of man to be liturgical, and there is no liturgy without a relationship – without love of God and love of neighbor. The Liturgy helps us cultivate the heart as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In the Divine Liturgy, we hear “Let us attend” before the prokeimenon, the epistle, the gospel, the creed, the anaphora, and the elevation of the Lamb. Moreover, the Cherubic Hymn exhorts the faithful to “lay aside all earthly care, that we may receive the King of all.” These exhortations are not merely a call to self-awareness, which is essentially the aim of meditation in mindfulness. These instructions direct the faithful to the awareness of being in communion with God through the person of Jesus Christ. Mindfulness thus has an anthropocentric orientation, but watchfulness is centered on Christ, and leads to union with the Father.

If we desire to find a proper place for meditation within the Orthodox Tradition, and to utilize it as a tool for healing and restoring the soul to God, we must look to the example of the hesychasts. We find that hesychasts have always recognized the importance of utilizing the breath in prayer, and attach the prayer of Jesus to their normal breath. They use sitting postures as a means to-wards awareness and prayer, for which they were labeled “navel gazers,” but by which they used to gaze into the uncreated light of God. They make use of physical postures – the sign of the cross, metanias, and prostrations – not to center our mind on our body, but to center our mind and body on Christ. We must not merely give our parishioners what the world is already offering, because what the world offers is deficient. Mindfulness – as described by the world – is great for the mind but bad for the heart, because it is completely cut off from the heart. We must learn from St. Theophan the Recluse: “You have to get out of your head and into your heart, because if you stay in your head, God will always appear to you as an external reality outside of yourself.” “The Kingdom of God is within you,” and it is yours today if you watch – and pray.

Conclusion

“[T]he very word meditation tends to evoke raised eyebrows and thoughts about mysticism and hocus-pocus in many people…. People did not understand that meditation is really about paying attention.” Our churches have been no exception to the fear surrounding mindfulness and meditation, but it is time we set these fears aside and give the faithful the tools required for their spiritual journey. Meditation has a place in the Church, but there is a danger if we take our lead from the Buddhists or the secular therapists. The attempt to fuse mindfulness and Orthodoxy leads to confusion, because mindfulness is disconnected from relationship, and ultimately undermines the central dogma of our faith, the personhood of Jesus Christ.

To become wholly human is only possible as persons in communion with Jesus Christ, and this communion is expressed most fully in the Liturgy. It is the very nature of man to be liturgical, and there is no liturgy without a relationship – without love of God and love of neighbor. The Liturgy helps us cultivate the heart as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In the Divine Liturgy, we hear “Let us attend” before the prokeimenon, the epistle, the gospel, the creed, the anaphora, and the elevation of the Lamb. Moreover, the Cherubic Hymn exhorts the faithful to “lay aside all earthly care, that we may receive the King of all.” These exhortations are not merely a call to self-awareness, which is essentially the aim of meditation in mindfulness. These instructions direct the faithful to the awareness of being in communion with God through the person of Jesus Christ. Mindfulness thus has an anthropocentric orientation, but watchfulness is centered on Christ, and leads to union with the Father.

If we desire to find a proper place for meditation within the Orthodox Tradition, and to utilize it as a tool for healing and restoring the soul to God, we must look to the example of the hesychasts. We find that hesychasts have always recognized the importance of utilizing the breath in prayer, and attach the prayer of Jesus to their normal breath. They use sitting postures as a means to-wards awareness and prayer, for which they were labeled “navel gazers,” but by which they used to gaze into the uncreated light of God. They make use of physical postures – the sign of the cross, metanias, and prostrations – not to center our mind on our body, but to center our mind and body on Christ. We must not merely give our parishioners what the world is already offering, because what the world offers is deficient. Mindfulness – as described by the world – is great for the mind but bad for the heart, because it is completely cut off from the heart. We must learn from St. Theophan the Recluse: “You have to get out of your head and into your heart, because if you stay in your head, God will always appear to you as an external reality outside of yourself.” “The Kingdom of God is within you,” and it is yours today if you watch – and pray.

FOOTNOTES

6. Ibid., p. 56.
7. Ibid., p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 67.
9. Ibid., p. 266.
11. Ibid., pp. 52-55.
12. Ibid., pp. 60, 65.
14. Ibid., p. 94.
16. Ibid., p. 23.
20. Ibid., p. 45.
23. Nikephoros the Monk, p. 204.
29. Timothy Ware, From the Introduction to The Art of Prayer, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1966, p. 22.
30. Lk. 10.42.
32. Lk. 17.21.
ELEANOR A. KINAN

On April 24, 2015, Eleanor A. Kinan fell asleep in the Lord in Grand Island, New York. The wife of the late Charles A. Kinan and mother of two sons, Mark (Christina) and Neal, Eleanor belonged to St. George Church, Niagara Falls, New York.

Eleanor served as President of the Antiochian Women North American Board from 1995 to 1997. As President, she oversaw the publication of a leadership guide and the design and distribution of the Antiochian Women pins. Under her leadership the Antiochian Women successfully raised monies to support two projects assigned them by Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory. The first was for the Antiochian Village Camp Expansion (1995 – 1996), and the second was for Theological Education (1996 – 1997).

After completing her term, Eleanor continued to serve on the North American Board as Past President and chaired the North American Board’s Nominating Committee.

Eleanor was very active locally, holding positions of leadership in her parish, serving as Director of the Church School and involved in her Antiochian Women’s chapter. She also held many offices at the diocesan level.

Eleanor was a dedicated, caring and loving person. This was evident in her service to the Antiochian Women, which she held very close to her heart. The Antiochian Women will always be indebted to her for her leadership and her many years of faithful service. May God grant her peace and may her memory be eternal.

Violet K. Robbat

ELEANOR A. KINAN

Bishop ANTOUN Celebrates Palm Sunday in Jacksonville

Archpriest Fr. Kamal Alrahil and the community of St. George welcomed His Grace Bishop ANTOUN during the weekend of April 3–5. His Grace was warmly received on Friday at the airport and was immediately taken to St. George Church Hall. Here he shared in a Lenten covered-dish meal, offered by the Ladies Auxiliary who had been busy preparing palm crosses.

On Saturday morning Sayidna presided over the Divine Liturgy for "Lazarus Saturday." A Lenten Luncheon was prepared by the Sunday School and Teen Soyo. The youth and Sayidna enjoyed a lengthy question-and-answer discussion. That evening he presided over Vespers, and then joined the Parish Council at dinner.
On Palm Sunday he presided over the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Sayidna is greatly loved in our church community, and four hundred people from the greater Jacksonville area gathered to celebrate the Feast with him.

On that day Sayidna ordained our son, Sub-deacon Eric Bateh, to the holy Diaconate. Afterwards, his parents, Ted and Jackie Bateh, offered a luncheon in the church hall to the whole community, in honor of Eric’s ordination.

Axios, Deacon Eric “Raphael”! We pray that you will be a good servant of the Lord and His Holy Church, and a faithful assistant to Fr. Kamal.

We enjoyed your visit, Sayidna ANTOUN, and may the Lord God grant you many years, Master!

Metropolitan JOSEPH in San Francisco

Parishioners of St. Nicholas Church in San Francisco and the faithful from parishes across the Bay Area welcomed Metropolitan JOSEPH on the weekend of May 1–5 on his first visit to St. Nicholas since becoming Metropolitan. Over the course of several days, Sayidna participated in meetings and visitations with the community, discussing his vision and priorities, and reflecting on his first year as Metropolitan of this God-protected Archdiocese.

The festivities included house parties hosted in Sayidna’s honor, as well as an elegant banquet at St. Nicholas that was attended by hierarchs from sister Orthodox jurisdictions. (Metropolitan JOSEPH has cultivated strong relationships with these jurisdictions in his twenty years of service as the Archbishop of Los Angeles and the West.) At the banquet, Metropolitan GERASIMOS (Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco), Archbishop BENJAMIN (Archbishop of San Francisco of the Orthodox Church in North America), the Very Reverend George Baalbaki (Pastor of St. Nicholas Church and Parish Council Chairman), and Mr. Salim Qaru all offered heartfelt tributes to Sayidna, expressing the great regard and high esteem in which he is held. The speeches were interspersed with Paschal hymns chanted by the Very Reverend Father Elias Bitar, Nick and Nathaniel Baba, and the Chanters of St. Nicholas Church.

In Sayidna’s address at the end of the Banquet, he praised the parishioners of St. Nicholas for their steadfast resolve to work together in love and unity to achieve great milestones in the church’s 76 years of existence. He also conveyed his love and appreciation for the Bay Area community, where he has many friends and which has borne witness to his ministry of twenty years. His remarks touched on the suffering of our people in the Middle East, and on the plight and persecution of the Christian communities, including those who have been martyred and driven out in Iraq and Syria. Special prayers were offered at all services for our kidnapped hierarchs of Aleppo, Archbishop PAUL (Yazigi) and Archbishop YOHANNA (Ibrahim). The weekend activities concluded with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Sunday, followed by a Luncheon hosted by St. Nicholas Church.

St. Nicholas, Los Angeles, Launches Media Ministry

St. Nicholas Antiochian Cathedral in Los Angeles has initiated “The Orthodox Light,” our new media ministry. This new outreach, by God’s grace, will share the love of Christ with the world, and introduce the world to our ancient faith. The brand new control room was consecrated by Metropolitan JOSEPH on February 1, 2015, following his West Coast enthronement.

Mission: Through the use of technology and media, we will reach out in worship, fellowship and Orthodox Christian education.

Fr. Michel Najim had the vision to use digital media for the spiritual benefit of all the faithful. In 2009, Fr. Najim began by forming a group of parishioners to start media ministry in St. Nicholas Cathedral. We are now equipped with the latest hardware for video and audio production and post-production work. We are in the process of constructing a dedicated area for in-house video production.

In March, 2014, the ministry completed the Sunday School Media Project: projectors are now installed in each classroom, able to display content from an array of media sources (iPads, laptops, Apple TVs, Wi-Fi routers and DVD players). The goal of this pioneer project was to let us use modern technology to teach Orthodox Christian educational programs in Sunday school, and for Hispanic outreach ministry.

We plan to do live video streaming, and produce educational materials for use by the entire Church. Involving our youth is one of our goals, but we also see the ministry...
as a tool to enhance pastoral care to the elderly and infirm.

Responsibilities: Cathedral website, social media, podcasting, video and audio production, video editing, Antioch radio, photography, graphic design, archiving

Please pray for us in this new endeavor. Members of the St. Nicholas Media Ministry Department members are Hanin Kastoun, Frank Boyer, Gaby Matta, Chuck Nassief, Naguib Mahfouz, James Samore, Kh. Eva Najim, Mikhail Zeeb, and Yasser Antoun.

For more information, please contact Hanin Kastoun, Chairman, 818-730-4843 or stnicmedia@gmail.com; or Frank Boyer, fboyer@charter.net or 818-424-7384.

Pittsburgh Celebrates Witness of Former Generations on Myrrh-Bearing Women Sunday

On the heels of a glorious Pascha led by Bishop THOMAS, Bishop JOHN returned to the parish he once served as pastor to acknowledge the witness of those who built our present building and those who organized the community in 1908 with Saint Raphael. As you know, St. Raphael of Brooklyn’s centennial of his falling asleep is being celebrated this year throughout the Archdiocese.

Our weekend started with us coming together and praying the Vespers service which was then followed by a well-attended dinner and a special program. Kweilin Nassar served as M.C. and Stephen Esper acknowledged those who served this community and built our present Church. We shared in a delicious meal together, recalled beautiful memories of our founders, viewed a slide show, and unveiled an exquisite new icon of the Root of Jesse, which was commissioned to mark this historic occasion and dedicated to the witness of our founders.

On Saturday, Bishop JOHN spoke of our founder, Christ Himself. He
went on to say that “we must not take the witness of each generation for granted. Each generation is charged with the responsibility of maintain the unaltered faith delivered to us by the Apostles.” Bishop JOHN gratefully acknowledged the devotion of those who were 80 years of age and older, while on Sunday he acknowledged with gratitude all of the faithful under the age of 80 who now actively maintain and witness to the apostolic faith. Bishop JOHN explained that “it is our responsibility to rightly deliver the faith and also maintain the unity of the Church. To do this we must really love one other.” Our goal is to nurture our youth so that they will continue to carry the torch of Orthodoxy for many generations to come, not just in name but in action, spirit and in truth! Fr. Joshua (Demetrios) Makoul explained the significance of the icon that he commissioned in memory of the Church founders. The Tree of Jesse is a depiction of the ancestors of Christ, shown in a tree which rises from Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of King David and is the original use of the family tree as a schematic representation of a genealogy. Our spiritual family has its family tree from Jesus to us now. He also spoke of the love and devotion of the Pittsburgh community and the rich history and faithfulness of the people.

Kh. Tammy Makoul

St. Mary, Cambridge, Massachusetts

St. Mary Orthodox Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts is proud to host this year’s biennial National Convention from July 19 through July 26 in beautiful Boston, Massachusetts. This historic city’s significance in American history is a fitting backdrop as we celebrate our own history of Orthodoxy in America – the 100th anniversary of the falling asleep of St. Raphael of Brooklyn. Making this event even more historic will be the presence of His Beatitude JOHN X presiding, and the first National Convention under His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH.

For nearly two years, committees have been hard at work to make Boston 2015 one of the most memorable in recent history, with something for everyone. Events planned include An Enchanting Evening Over Boston, Enliven to Christ, a Night to Celebrate our Archdiocese, the Hufli, Teen Banquet, the Grand Banquet and more – culminating in the Hierarchical Liturgy celebrated by His Beatitude JOHN X, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and our Diocesan Bishops! Summertime in Boston is especially ideal for kids and families. The Kids Club and Tween Club will have daily activities on and off site, including trips to renowned local museums. (Registration is required). Young adult events are being coordinated for those interested in exploring the city. If you’re a sports fan, the hotel is a short walking distance to world famous Fenway Park. If you’d rather stay and reconnect with friends and family, the hotel has the perfect amenities to enjoy fellowship and fun as well.

Rooms at the Boston Sheraton are nearly sold out; book your reservation quickly! Registration for many events is also limited – and early-bird pricing ends soon – so we encourage you to register online today! For more information on events, schedules, hotel and travel arrangements and to register, visit http://www.acboston2015.com.

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The Antiochian Heritage Foundation is still striving to accomplish the vision of Metropolitan JOSEPH and meet the growing needs of our North American Archdiocese.

The mission of the Antiochian Heritage Foundation is to encourage the spiritual and financial commitment of the faithful to preserving our heritage, so that it can be passed on to future generations. We do so by supporting our hierarchs, clergy, churches, monasteries, and programs, seeking aid for every department and organization in order to meet all the current needs of this Archdiocese and to ensure its bright future.

More than ever, we need to protect our future, to ensure that our children are able to express their faith and live spiritual lives.

More news to follow!

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America

Antiochian Heritage Foundation

Economos Antony Gabriel, Chairman
St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, 555-575 Jean-Talon East, Montreal (Quebec) Canada H2R1T8
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Email: heritagefoundation@antiochian.org Website: www.antiochian.org/heritage

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We are fortunate to have as our keynote speaker Father John Maximov (Contact), a monk of the Holy Mountain and Presidential Research Fellow at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Fr. Maximov was also a great speaker at the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West Clergy Retreat last February at the invitation of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH.

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