

The St. George CHAMPION

The Parish Newsletter of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Little Falls, NJ

October 2009

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More Protestants Find a Home in the Orthodox Antioch Church

By SAMUEL G. FREEDMAN

Reprinted from the New York Times, October 2, 2009

LINTHICUM HEIGHTS, Md. — Cal Oren was threading his way through the Santa Cruz Mountains of California early one evening in 1993, driving his wife, brother and three tired children back from a day of hiking amid the redwoods. As their car neared the town of Ben Lomond, Mr. Oren said, his brother pointed to a church on the roadside and said: “I’ve been inside this. It’s really neat.”

So Mr. Oren pulled to a stop, and as the children stayed in the car, the grown-ups gingerly padded into the sanctuary of Saints Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church. A lifelong Presbyterian, Mr. Oren knew virtually nothing about the Antiochians or, for that matter, Orthodox Christianity in general. He had always associated Ben Lomond with hippies, geodesic domes and marijuana fields.

As he entered, a vespers service was under way. Maybe two dozen worshipers stood, chanting psalms and hymns. Incense filled the dark air. Icons of apostles and saints hung on the walls. The ancientness and austerity stood at a time-warp remove from the evangelical circles in which Mr. Oren traveled, so modern, extroverted and assertively relevant.

“This was a Christianity I had never encountered before,” said Mr. Oren, 55, a marketing consultant in commercial construction. “I was frozen in my tracks. I felt like I was in the actual presence of God, almost as if I was in heaven. And I’m not the kind of person who gets all woo-hoo.”

The ineffable disclosure of that evening, a 15-minute glimpse into Byzantium, rattled everything certain in Mr. Oren’s spiritual life. Even as he and his family kept attending a Presbyterian church near their home in suburban Baltimore, he stepped down as a ruling elder and Bible-study instructor. In

1995, he attended his first service at Holy Cross, an Antiochian church here, about 10 miles south of Baltimore. By late 1996, he was a regular, and in May 1997, he and his family converted and joined.

Any person’s conversion is by nature an individual and idiosyncratic journey, and Mr. Oren’s reflected not only his visceral sense that Orthodoxy had a “core of holy tradition” but also his intense concern over theological concepts like giving the Eucharist to baptized infants, which may not animate other believers quite the same way.

In 1995, Mr. Oren attended his first service at an Antiochian church... By late 1996, he was a regular, and in May 1997, he and his family converted and joined.

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• Community News •

Baptisms

Nicholas Haddad.....May 3, 2009
 John HaddadMay 9,, 2009
 Marissa Klele.....May 10, 2009
 Gabriella Habib.....May 8, 2009
 Tyler RotellaMay 24, 2009
 Gizelle StibryanMay 31, 2009
 Marlo Fayad.....May 31, 2009
 Abraham KhouryJune 2, 2009
 Henry Cichowski.....July 18, 2009
 Judy HannaAugust 2, 2009
 Celine Hajal.....August 2, 2009
 Hannah Wyman.....August 22, 2009
 Maryanna DanhoAugust 29, 2009
 Dylan Kassab.....September 12, 2009
 Anna HaddadSeptember 13, 2009
 Anthony Darbilli,September 27, 2009

Marriages

Rami Salloum & Zouha BittarJune 27, 2009
 Matthew Barchetto &
 Nicole Shabagg.....August 22, 2009
 Matthew Sexton &
 Raline Chalet.....August 20, 2009

Funerals

Virginia SowmaJune 1, 2009
 Robert Lynch.....May 30, 2009
 Alfred NahassJune 15, 2009
 Louise Balonze.....June 20, 2009
 Elias ChaletJuly 24, 2009
 Janet White.....August 22, 2009
 Rose Marie ZamlootSeptember 24, 2009

October is Youth Month!

Every October our Archdiocese spotlights the work of our youth, especially in our SOYO groups. This issue of **The Champion** will feature the talent of our Teens, including the Eastern Diocese Oratorical winners in the Junior and Senior Division... read on!

Guess Who?

This handsome young man was born in Syria in 1961, immigrated to the U.S. in 1989 and is celebrating his 20th year as a member of our St. George Community.

Can you guess who it is? Look for the answer in December's issue of *The Champion!*



Advent Adult Education

Sponsored by the Fellowship of St. John the Divine

Saturday November 21st

Guest Speaker:

Fr. Anthony Michaels

Event is free. All St. George parishioners ages teen and up are welcome to attend. A light Lenten meal will be served.

More Protestants Find a Home (Continued from page 1)

Yet in its broader outlines, his movement from the Protestant realm into the Orthodox one, specifically into the Antiochian branch, attests to a significant and fascinating example of denominational migration. Over the last 20 years, the Antiochian Orthodox Church — with its roots in Syria and Lebanon and its longtime membership in the United States made up almost entirely of Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants — has become the destination of choice for thousands of Protestants of Northern European ancestry.

The visible shift began in 1987 with the conversion of nearly 2,000 evangelical Christians, led by Peter E. Gillquist and other alumni of the Dallas Theological Seminary and the Campus Crusade for Christ. More recently, a wave of converts has arrived from such mainline Protestant denominations as the Episcopalian and Lutheran.

Some 70 percent of Antiochian Orthodox priests in the United States are converts, according to Bradley Nassif, who, as a theology professor at North Park University in Chicago, is a leading scholar of the religion. A generation or two ago, Professor Nassif said, converts made up barely 10 percent of Antiochian clergy.

Professor Nassif went so far, in a 2007 article in *Christianity Today* magazine, as to suggest that the 21st century might become the “Orthodox century” as disenchanted Protestants grew attracted to the historical roots, theological rigor and social conservatism of the Eastern Christian denominations.

Whether or not the prediction pans out, it is certainly true that no American convert comes to the Antiochian church by convenience or ease. The denomination has only about 250,000 members in 250 congregations in the country, Professor Nassif estimated. Worshipers stand during most of the two-hour Divine Liturgy each Sunday. Nearly half the days in the year require fasting from meat, dairy, eggs and most fish.

Yet when Mr. Oren and his family joined Holy Cross, they found kindred spirits in more ways than one. The church’s pastor, Father Gregory Mathewes-Green, had left the

Episcopal ministry to convert. His wife, Frederica Mathewes-Green, had written perhaps the definitive book on the subject, “Facing East: A Pilgrim’s Journey Into the Mysteries of Orthodoxy” (HarperOne, 2006).

Alienated by what he called “spiritual and theological chaos and moral confusion” in the Episcopal Church, Father Mathewes-Green, 62, started Holy Cross in early 1993 with 19 members, five of them from his own family. When he formally renounced his Episcopal vows, he lost not only his annual salary but also the rectory that was his home.

“There were many times,” he recalled in a recent interview, “when I thought, ‘Today is the day I have to look through the Help Wanted ads.’ ”

In the years since, though, Holy Cross has grown to 120 members, nearly two-thirds of them converts, and has bought and paid off a \$265,000 building. Fittingly for a congregation of spiritual seekers, Holy Cross occupies a stone structure built by Methodists and most recently occupied by the Pentecostals of the Korean Full Gospel New Generation Church.

While the sun streams through a stained-glass window of Jesus that was installed by the original congregation, most of the icons were painted within the last dozen years by an Orthodox convert, Carolyn Shuey. The other day, Father Mathewes-Green was tutoring the latest prospective convert, a Roman Catholic immigrant

from Congo.

The unexpected evolution of the Antiochian Church has had only one drawback, at least at Holy Cross. When Father Mathewes-Green was persuaded several years ago to raise money with a church supper, people flocked to Holy Cross, expecting the savory specialties of the Levant. What they got was the culinary outcome of the priest’s former life as an Episcopalian from South Carolina: hot dogs and brownies.

The fund-raiser, all prayers and chants to the contrary, was a loser.

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Over the last 20 years, the Antiochian Orthodox Church — with its roots in Syria and Lebanon and its longtime membership in the United States made up almost entirely of Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants — has become the destination of choice for thousands of Protestants of Northern European ancestry.

The Silent Mile

By Hannah Sabbagh

To an outsider, perhaps one of the few we passed along the hiking trail, our group looked strange. The oddities were not within our group itself, but rather our behavior. We weren't speaking. Twenty-seven people, leaders included, marching through thick Pennsylvania forests in complete silence. Even when rain began to trickle through the forest's canopy and join the beads of sweat falling down our foreheads, not a word was spoken. This past summer marked my ninth and final two weeks as a camper at the Antiochian Village camp in Western Pennsylvania. The camp is associated with the Antiochian Orthodox Church of North America, the religion I was born into and have learned to love and respect. Attending camp has been the highlight of many a summer for me. Reconnecting with friends who share my faith is always nice. This past summer was extraordinarily special because I was in the oldest cabin and received special privileges, including a 13-mile hike off-camp in preserved Pennsylvania forests.

The morning of the hike, I was nervous. Very little information is provided as to the location of the trail and the activities that are to be completed along the way and at the actual campsite. We packed our camp provided bags with some provisions and a few other items before boarding the vans that would take us to the park where we would begin our hike. About halfway through our first day of hiking, we stopped for a rest at a cliff that overlooked what seemed like all of Pennsylvania. It was here with mountains and mountains of wilderness spread before us that we were told we would be walking two miles silently: one mile after our rest, and another on the way home the next day. These silent miles were to be times of reflection; they were to be used as moments to remember what, for many of us, had been nine summers worth of memories at the affectionately nicknamed "village". We began our first quiet mile and I quickly

understood how rewarding quiet could be. As we stumbled over jagged rocks and ancient roots, thoughts echoed in my mind as I wondered what I would really take home with me after those final two weeks. I hoped that I would not remember them as final; that would mean that everything I learned was finite. I wished instead that I would see them as a new beginning. My return home was chance to take nine years of stored up learning and unleash it all upon the rest of the world.

Over the two silent miles I walked on that hike, I thought mostly of how the village was a place where I was surrounded by love and compassion. In my years as a camper, I never met a rude or ignorant person. It was the place that taught me to accept myself and forgive my own flaws as well as be accepting of others. Without that camp, I would not be half the person I am today. I learned values that I've carried over into all aspects of my life, especially high school where peer pressure can seem overwhelming. I've taken what I learned about helping others and being tolerant back to my hometown, where I infuse these ideals into everything from the toddlers I baby-sit to the volleyball team of which I am senior captain.

Though I may not get the chance to return to the Antiochian Village in the future, I know that everything I learned will always be with me. The Silent Mile I walked with some of my closest friends brought back as many memories of my first years of camp as it did of my recent years. The lessons I learned returned to me in a deluge of moral and principled thoughts. Though my summers at camp have ended, I hope to continue spreading the acceptance and thoughtful observation I learned, whether at home or in a new environment such as the college I have chosen.

Important SOYO Dates

The Teens are collecting coats, hats, sweats, sneakers, new socks until Dec 5th (No summer clothing, please).

St. George Hafli October 17 ticket are \$35.00 each 12 and under are \$15.00

October 25 visit the Boys Orphanage

Sunday November 8 Falafel Sale

November 13-15 Delegates meeting at the Village

Saturday November 21st Retreat 9:30 to 1:30

Saturday December 5th Boys Orphanage Christmas party

Sunday December 6 decorate the Church

Saturday December 12 Trip to NY to feed and clothe the hungry

Eastern Region Junior Oratorical Festival 2009

By George Fakes

Many of us have played the game Jenga. This simple game involves pulling blocks out from a block tower and hoping that the tower doesn't fall. Although the game might seem simple, there is an underlying message behind this children's game: without the support of the many blocks in the tower and without a good, solid foundation, the tower will collapse on itself (not to mention you'll lose the game).

Although the simple moral to this children's game is often overlooked, it can be applied to our everyday lives as Orthodox Christians. Most of us become satisfied with just going to church, and feel like we don't have to do anything more to support the church. We rely completely on our priests to perform the church's duties. But what we don't realize is that we all represent those blocks in the Jenga game—we are all essential to the tower of our church and without everyone doing their best to support their piece of the tower, the church-tower becomes prone to falling.

But how do we be that supportive piece of the tower? The most important way to be that supportive piece of the church and be productive Christians is to do what we are told by Saints John

Chrysostom and Basil the Great: "Be mindful, O Lord, of those who bear fruit and do good works in thy holy Churches, and who remember the poor." We Orthodox Christians must in our every day lives demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23, Saint Paul says: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law." And living this way doesn't just mean choosing to be nice to your sibling when you want to. This means living according to these fruits in every situation, with all people.

My church youth group annually takes a trip to a large city to distribute food to those in need. Although this city is known for the amount of homeless people residing on the streets, we probably don't take it seriously enough. Some people even joke and make fun of homeless people, calling them "hobos," and making cruel, distasteful jokes regarding their appearance. Some of my friends even dress up as homeless people for Halloween as a joke. What we fail to realize is, those lanky,

grumpy "hobos" are people just like you and me in the eyes of God. Unfortunately, we all contribute to this problem. Proverbs 21, verse 13 says: "He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard." This verse tells us that our prayers will be heard only if we meet the needs of other people. Our Lord, Jesus Christ commands us to

help those in need, without asking for anything in return. In John 13, verse 34, He echoes this when He says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." This is a command from our Lord, not a suggestion. He sacrificed his life for all men, so we must do the same.

All people are poor in some way. When people say someone is poor or needy, we almost always assume that they are financially poor. But that is not always true—people who are poor aren't necessarily all poor in money. They may be poor in spirit or faith. Giving to the poor doesn't just mean giving money, food, or clothing. It also means giving joy to others, because you never know when a simple smile could brighten someone's day. As Mother Teresa once said, "Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing."

As Orthodox Christians, it is our duty to spread the joy of Christ to those who do not believe, just as the Apostles did. At a recent sleep-over with friends, one of them who is an atheist asked me questions about Orthodox Christianity because he saw me saying a prayer. I was surprised at how little he knew about the fundamentals of the Christian faith. If we do not give those who are poor of faith knowledge of the faith, how will they ever follow Christ? Saint Paul says in Romans 10, verse 14: "and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Knowledge comes first, but it means nothing if we do not live what we believe. Christianity isn't just a title we can wear around. We cannot truly be Christians unless we live like Christians, loving God unconditionally and healing the poverty of others. The best way to spread the faith is to live it, always bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.



Be mindful, O Lord,
of those who bear fruit
and do good works
in thy holy Churches,
and who remember
the poor.

The Anaphora of St. Basil the Great and John Chrysostom

**"A new commandment
I give to you,
that you love one another
even as I have loved you,
that you also love
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This is a command
from our Lord,
not a suggestion.**

October

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
■ <i>Light shaded dates represent days of Fasting</i>				1	2	3
4 <i>Orthodoxy Sunday</i>	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 Parish Council Meeting	22	23	24
25 Annual Parish Meeting	26	27	28	29	30	31

November

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13 Delegates Meeting	14 Antiochian Village
15 <i>Nativity Fast Begins</i>	16	17	18 Parish Council Meeting	19	20	21 Fr. Anthony Visit: Teens 9:30 am Fellowship 6 pm
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	■ <i>Light shaded dates represent days of Fasting</i>			

The Holy Mysteries (Sacraments)

By Deacon Michael Ibrahim

It is well believed that the Orthodox Church believes in seven sacraments. But the question is not what these sacraments are but rather why number seven and not five or six or eight for instance? And what is a sacrament, what does it mean to us as believers?

Well, let us start from the beginning where we find the normal word for sacraments is the Greek word *mysterion*, from which the English word *mystery* is derived. Through the use of this word the Orthodox Church emphasizes the mystery of God's love and grace.

Originally, sacrament is a Western word, from the Latin *sacramentum* ("sacrum tacere" to make holy). At the time of the expansion of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, *sacramentum* meant primarily the oath taken by Roman soldiers upon enlisting in the army. The Christian writer Tertullian (3rd century) applied this term to Baptism because, as he explained, Baptism was our enlistment into Christ's army. From then on the word *sacramentum*, has been applied to those essential acts of the church, which according to Christian faith, were instituted by Christ Himself as means of our unity with Him and His saving acts.

Meanwhile, the Greek Christians used a different word: *mysterion* (mystery) which has both deeper and wider meaning than that of the Latin *sacramentum*. For, in the first place they called "mystery" the entire ministry of Christ, through Whose life, death, resurrection and glorification God saves man and the world. Christ thus both reveals and accomplishes the Divine plan of salvation, kept secret (mystery) until His coming. And since the church is to proclaim that mystery and communicate it to men, the essential acts by which she is accomplishing this are also called mysteries...through all these acts we are made participants and beneficiaries of the great mystery of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ.

The acts are visible (immersion into water, anointment, and communion) but the reality into which they introduce us is invisible: it is grace, the communion with God and the power of a new life in the Holy Spirit. The chief purpose of the sacraments is to impart to the believer the life of Christ. Through the sacraments God shares His life with us, redeems us from sin and death and bestows on us the glory of immortality. The Kingdom of God becomes accessible now in the sacraments through which "being in Christ" and sharing in the life of God are realized.

The sacraments are Jesus' way of continuing His presence with us on earth. They are like the hand of Jesus reaching out personally to each one of us today now forgiving, now

healing, now blessing, now consecrating, and now uniting.

Christ remained visible in the church which is His Body, through which He is made present in the world today. From the church, Christ reaches out to us with the sacraments to bring to us His grace and love. Every sacrament puts us in touch with Christ and applies to us the power of the cross and the Resurrection. Every sacrament is a Theophany, the appearance of God to us for a specific purpose and need.

The greatest fruit of the grace that we receive through the sacraments is LOVE. In the words of the Apostle John, "... love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.... no man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us" (I John 4: 7, 8, and 12).

Traditionally, the Orthodox never limited the sacraments to seven. The number seven is rather symbolic and is used to indicate the perfection of grace. For example, the gifts of the Spirit are seven (Isaiah 11: 2-4). The number seven was adopted only in the seventeenth century under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church when the Council of Trent officially affirmed the sacraments as seven. This was done in opposition to the Protestant Reformers who recognized only two sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist.

To place a limitation on the number of sacraments is to view them from a very narrow perspective. If a sacrament happens whenever God's grace is mediated to man through matter, then there is no limit to the number of sacraments. Indeed, the whole of creation becomes a sacrament, a Theophany, through which we see God.

The church baptizes infants as well as adults as the new birth into the new life of Christ. Baptism is understood and celebrated as the person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Chrismation (or confirmation) is the "sealing" of the new life in Christ by the life-creating Spirit. In chrismation the person receives the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in order to have the power to live the new life in the new humanity of Christ.

Holy Communion is the "sacrament of sacraments" in that it is the banquet of the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment of every other sacrament. In Holy Communion we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eternal Passover Lamb, who makes us alive and holy with Himself.

(Continued on page 6)

ANGELS (cont.)

Marriage in Christ allows our human love to become divine and unending. Christ comes to our human love, frees it from sin and grants it everlasting joy in His Kingdom of love.

By our anointing of the sick in Christ's name, we consecrate our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ and we are healed by Him. By anointing with oil in Christ's name, our wounds become the way of life and not to death.

In Confession, the sacrament of repentance, we come to Christ and receive His divine forgiveness. We are allowed once more to enter into Holy Communion with Him in the church.

The one sacrament within the church which guarantees the identity and continuity of the church in all times and places is the sacrament of priesthood, the "holy orders," as they are called. The priesthood exists within the church as the sign of the certain presence in the community of Christ Himself. Christ is present in the church as its head and is manifested in the Body through the ministry of the priesthood.

It is evident that not all sacraments are of equal importance. There is a hierarchy among them with the Eucharist occupying the position of greatest importance. Some of the other sacraments or sacramentals listed by Orthodox writers are: Monastic Profession, the Great Blessing of Water at Epiphany, the Funeral Service, the Consecration of a church, the Relics of Saints, the minor Sanctification of wine, bread, oil, fruits, homes, etc..., Charity where St. John Chrysostom states, "Charity is a sacrament...for our sacraments are above all God's charity and love of mankind."

Sacraments are very important in the life of the church and to us as believers. Every sacrament puts us in touch with Christ and applies to us the power of the cross and the Resurrection. They are like the hands of Jesus Christ reaching out over to touch us with His love and power, to let us know that He is still with us.

THREE-BAR CROSS

Did you know that the Orthodox cross has three bars and each one means something? The short bar on the top represents the sign that was placed on the cross which read, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews" (in Latin the initials are "INRI"). The middle bar – the longest – is the bar upon which Our Lord's arms were stretched and nailed. The bottom bar is the footrest which supported Our Lord's body.

While many people popularly refer to this cross as a "Russian" cross, it actually predates the Christianization of Russia in 988 AD, although generally, in earlier depictions of the Crucifixion, the bottom bar is horizontal rather than angled.

Various reasons have been given for slanting the bottom bar. There is one tradition which states that, at the moment of His death, Our Lord's foot slipped and the foot rest tilted. A highly symbolic interpretation states that the slanted bar refers to the thief crucified on Our Lord's right side – the "wise thief" who repented – who went to heaven and to the unrepentant thief crucified on Christ's left side who did not. Another explanation is that the slant is an attempt to depict that the footrest slanted downward, toward the viewer, albeit in a two, rather than three, dimensional form.

Fellowship News

by Michael Kabbash

The Fellowship of St. John the Divine is dusting off the Summer cobwebs and getting back to work. We have had two meetings to discuss our upcoming calendar, and we encourage everyone to participate in our spiritual and social activities.

We had been discussing a Fellowship/SOYO Reunion night, where we would invite old past Teen SOYO members to join us for a night out at a local bar/restaurant and reconnect, let them know what they have been missing. Elias Chalet will be working to make contacts during the month of October and we will schedule a specific date for this outing in November.

Saturday Nov. 21st, Fr. Anthony Michaels will be visiting our parish for the weekend. The Fellowship will be inviting neighboring parishes to host an Advent retreat-discussion with Fr. Anthony. We will be providing a Lenten meal, and we

invite all to join us for an enlightening evening.

We are planning on creating Home Visit teams to go out with Fr. Elias to visit those shut in or sick. This is an outreach program to elderly or infirmed members of our community who need to know they are still part of our St. George family. We encourage everyone to join us in this effort.

Nov 13-15th is the Fall Delegates Meeting at the Antiochian Village.

We will be assisting the Teens in their outreach to feed homeless on Dec. 5th, and will be at the Boys Orphanage on the 12th. We should offer any assistance and participation possible with these events.

Also, we may be hosting a raffle in December as a small fundraiser – flat screen TV, Rock Band, etc. – something fun for the holidays. Lastly, keep an eye out for a Fellowship Coffee House before all the craziness of the holiday season sets in!

Eastern Region Senior Oratorical Festival 2009

By George Juzdan

For He was hungry, but when did I give him food? He was thirsty, but when did I give him a drink? He was a stranger, but when did I take him in? I ask myself these questions, but rarely is the answer good enough. Why don't I feed the hungry, visit the sick, or help those in need more often? Sure, I visit nursing home residence and volunteer in food banks, and I temporarily feel as though I have answered Christ's call, but after I return to the comforts of my home, I no longer help or even think of the poor or the homeless until I revisit the following year with my Teen Soyo. Why am I unable on my own to stop and speak to the homeless men and women on the side of the road? They have souls, hearts, even families, just as we do. Many times I have noticed that fear restrains me from following Christ in that way. Then I realize that there are so many additional ways to respond to the needs of our fellow man. Yes, it is very difficult to bear good fruit and to remember the poor. That is why in the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil, immediately after the consecration, we ask our Lord to "Be mindful of those who bear fruit and do good works in thy holy Churches, and who remember the poor".

Jesus bore fruit through his preaching, miracles and other good works and He tells us to follow Him. Jesus also offers us a new commandment "that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34) We as Orthodox Christians are called to love and give unto the least of our brethren. We should also emulate those who have used love as an instrument of change and peace; Pope John Paul II, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Theresa are a few of the notable recent religious leaders who not only preached the Gospel but more significantly inspired millions of people to do good works for those in need. We remember them because they remembered our Lord's message and sowed seeds, which bore fruit.

Have you ever tried to plant a fruit-bearing tree? My grandfather planted two peach trees in his backyard, and every year we would watch them grow taller and taller, eventually reaching the age to bear fruit. However every year he would look outside with disappointment because no fruit blossoms emerged. One day when my family and I visited my grandparent's house, we were shocked to notice that the peach

trees were gone. Yes, by himself my eighty-year-old "Jido" pulled two peach trees out of the ground. After checking that my grandfather did not throw out his back, I asked him why he pulled out the trees. And he simply stated, "They gave us no fruit". My Grandfather's anger at the trees that bore no fruit reminds me of Jesus' strong reaction to the fruitless fig tree. That fig tree, which then withered away, represents the spiritual emptiness of the Pharisees who did not accept Jesus' miracles and works. Usually we don't associate Jesus with anger but in this instance He was trying to teach a lesson. I believe that bearing fruit is a responsibility that each Christian

has from the day of our baptism. God has given us abilities and talents that we must utilize not only for our own betterment, but also for the welfare of others.

People may choose different paths to bear fruit in Christ's holy churches. I have always considered my grandfather as a wonderful role model in that way. He has been an integral part of our Orthodox church since he moved to this country in the 1950's. He is known for handing out the palms on Palm Sunday, cutting the bread at our festival, as well as being available anytime he is asked to serve our church community. Every time we are mindful of those who bear good fruit, in my heart I know we are praying for generously hearted people, such as my grandfather.

From my youth, similarly, I always took serving the church very seriously; I was

taught that the church is my home. Making pizza at our annual festival, actively participating as a member and officer of Teen SOYO, being an alter boy, and most significantly being ordained a sub-deacon, are some of the ways I have tried to fulfill Christ's call when he says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven." (Mathew 5:16) Jesus' words are such an important part of our faith because they define what kind of children we should be. Serving the church as a sub-deacon had been a thought in my mind for several years. After being very inspired at one convention, I realized I wanted to establish a stronger foundation within my orthodox faith. Now having been sub-deacon for over a year, I have the responsibility of being a role model for the youth of our



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and who remember
the poor.

The Anaphoras of St. Basil the Great and John Chrysostom

Not only must we bear fruit, we must understand how to bear fruit. I can go to the food bank every weekend for the rest of my life, but if I don't understand why I'm going or if I am apathetic, I am not really bearing fruit.

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Eastern Region Senior Oratorical (Continued)

church, especially the younger altar boys. This role in serving my church has helped me continue to follow the path of Jesus and choose the moral path when tempted by immoral activities.

Since I love food, as you can tell, I would like to return to my food analogies. When a farmer plants a garden, he exerts a tremendous amount of time and effort into his work so that good fruit will grow. “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Mathew 7:18) A hurricane doesn’t stand a chance against a good farmer because even if his crops are ruined he finds the will power to replant them. Our Lord is like a good farmer and He has helped me survive during all of my spiritual hurricanes. I lose my way and forget to do the works of God. However, when I receive the Sacraments of Confession and Communion I am placed back on the right path of being mindful of the least of my brethren. Many people understand bearing fruit as helping the poor and visiting shut-ins, which is partly true; however it involves much more than that. As teens we have so many opportunities to bear fruit and do good works. We can volunteer in our community by coaching youth sports teams, raising money for charities such as Relay for Life, brightening the day of elderly neighbors by giving them a

smile and a hug, praying for those in need and participating in Orthodox Youth Outreach trips. Perhaps the most important good deed we can perform, however, is to bring the gift of Christianity to non-believers. When we “give them things heavenly for things earthly,” we will also receive God’s blessings. As Jesus teaches us from the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, sometimes we cannot tell which seeds that we sow will bear good fruit. Yet, as long as we continue to sow the seeds of Christianity, we are following Christ’s teachings.

Not only must we bear fruit, we must understand how to bear fruit. I can go to the food bank every weekend for the rest of my life, but if I don’t understand why I’m going or if I am apathetic, I am not really bearing fruit. The American author Jack London defined charity in this illustration, “A bone to the dog is not charity. Charity is the bone shared with the dog, when you are just as hungry as the dog.” When we feed the hungry, we must also be hungry in our yearning to fulfill Christ’s call. In order to bear good fruit we must hunger for Christ himself! To fulfill this hunger we partake of Christ’s body and blood every Sunday because we as Orthodox Christians understand that it is only through Christ that we can bear the fruit worthy enough to gain us entrance into His Heavenly Kingdom.



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