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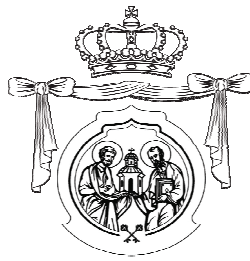
AND MUCH
MUCH
MORE,
INSIDE!

The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West & The Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest

ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN'S SUMMER NEWSLETTER



His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

May 31, 2018

Beloved Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you in the Name of Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

By the Grace of God, we have commemorated the Life-giving and Saving Passion of Our Lord, His Glorious Third-day Resurrection, His Ascension and Enthronement at the Right Hand of the Father, and His Sending of the All-Holy Spirit upon the Disciples. We have spent countless hours in liturgical services. We have shed tears of repentance. We have embraced one another with joy and love. We have fasted, and we have feasted.

I would like to ask all of you: *Now what?*

Have we merely gone through the motions of the church services to mark all of these saving acts of God to simply return to “normal” life? To begin scheduling our summer months to fit in vacations, camps for the children, attendance at parish life conferences, cook-outs, yardwork, baseball games, etc.?

In response to these questions, let us call to mind that the Church gives us the Sunday of All Saints as the final celebration of this joyous time of year. Once we have commemorated all of the saving acts of Christ, we must remember that all of these things have come to pass so that human beings may become saints! We did not experience the solemnity of the days of Holy Week and the joy of the days of Pascha through Pentecost to simply *learn about* what Christ has done but to *be transfigured by* what Christ has done – the same way we see in the examples of the lives of the Saints.

Let us not move from the grace-filled days we have recently experienced into a return to normal life as defined by our secular society, but let us partake of the Living Water poured forth in these days to renew and transfigure all of our lives and creation itself.

Praying that our days of spring and summer will be ones of renewal and sanctification, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

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

A Message From Our Spiritual Advisor, Fr. David Hovik

Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan Woman is the longest recorded conversation He has with anyone in the Gospels. After reading it, I don't believe most modern Christian Groups would hold up this conversation up as the way to win converts: as a way to convince people that they should commit themselves to following Jesus Christ.

Why? Jesus seems so blunt. People might even view Him as lacking compassion because he provokes this woman (whom we know to be the future St. Photini - at her baptism) by asking her to Go, call her husband: knowing that she was NOT married & living with someone out of wedlock. Which, by the way, is still a sin! Jesus hits the nail (this woman's current & past sins) squarely on the head. She said: I don't have a husband & Jesus responded: Correct. You have had 5 husbands & the man you are now with is not your husband.

We know that God is LOVE and that Jesus is the Son of God. He was all knowing and full of compassion yet, this encounter does not fit our paradigm in terms of how that would play out in a conversation. Which means what? It's Time for a paradigm shift on our part. Love, Compassion & Kindness does not mean that God will avoid painful revelations concerning our real problems with sin. In fact, as Orthodox Christians, we should see God Confronting our sin as an act of compassion.

Clearly, God did not always approach people this way, but He often did. The woman caught in adultery, driving out the money changers in the Temple, on more than one occasion, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who condemned Him for healing on the Sabbath are examples of this. He rebuked certain guests at a dinner party (to which he had been invited) because they proudly chose the best seats in the house. He then confronts the host for inviting these very people and said he should have invited the poor, the infirm and the lame. In each of these cases our Lord is doing an X-Ray or an MRI of sorts and letting these various people see what's really going on inside of them: Giving them insight into their hearts!

In every case of confrontation, our Lord was acting out of Love. He cannot act any other way because He IS Love. He spoke the Truth. He cannot act any other way because He IS Truth. So, here we go with a major paradigm shift: God's love is not always Warm & Fuzzy and the truth can hurt! For example: Go and sell ALL that you have and then come and follow Me. Jesus was trying to HEAL that Rich Young Ruler but we are told: he went away sorrowful. Why? Jesus (without hesitation) addressed THE PROBLEM that was blocking his spiritual growth.

In some case, like in the Gospel about the Samaritan Woman, people respond positively. In the case of St. Photini, she was baptized on Pentecost (along with her five sisters: Anatole, Photo, Photis, Paraskeve, Kyriake, and her two sons, Photeinos & Joseph). Then she began preaching the Gospel everywhere until she was eventually martyred by Nero. St. Nikodemus eventually responds, after Jesus challenges him for his lack of understanding - as one of the teachers of Israel. Those that responded positively understood that Jesus was correcting them out of love.

When you feel convicted about some particular act or a pattern of response in your life while: in prayer, reading a spiritual book, listening to a homily, reading the bible or just quietly contemplating your life... THANK GOD FOR THAT & RESPOND POSITIVELY TO IT! That is the place at which each of us must arrive, if we are going to be healed in our heart (our nous). This may require a monumental shift in your understanding of how God works but if we are being honest with ourselves: We must shift! Because clearly this IS how He works: He allows us to see painful things within us that have to be addressed. The very things that are preventing our healing. St. Nektarios said: Don't be afraid of the difficulties of spiritual struggle. For we have God as a helper, who strengthens us in the difficult path of virtue. God is not only going to point out these areas that need to be changes & resolved within us. If we humble ourselves before this revelation, He is (through His Grace) going to lead us through that healing process. He wants us to be WELL.

In Christ, with all my love, your most unworthy spiritual adviser,
Fr. David





THE MOST REVEREND
 METROPOLITAN JOSEPH
 358 MOUNTAIN ROAD
 ENGLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY 07631

ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

THE MOST REVEREND METROPOLITAN PHILIP – FOUNDER

✧ A SISTERHOOD SERVING CHRIST THROUGH SERVING OTHERS ✧

✧ DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES & THE WEST ✧
 ✧ DIOCESE OF EAGLE RIVER & THE NORTHWEST ✧

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE



Blessings & Greetings Reverend Fathers & Beloved Sisters in Christ,

I’m sooo excited about our PLC in Portland, Oregon & getting to know more of our Sisters in Christ in the Pacific NW section of our Diocese. Woohoo – Hope to see many of you there!

I can’t believe this is the end of my third year as President of our Diocese. There are no words to describe the number of blessings that serving this ministry has brought. First & foremost is the blessing of the countless Sisters in Christ who have come into my life. As each of you participate in this ministry, meeting new Sisters in Christ & forming relationships, rooted in our faith, is what I pray happens for all of you.

Last summer at our PLC, I issued a challenge for us all to strive to truly heed the call of being a “Sisterhood Serving Christ” by getting to know women in other parishes. I am so proud of the GREAT results! All around our Diocese there have been multiple instances of ladies getting together for retreats, ladies Tea’s, book clubs, etc. I will be continuing to encourage this type of fellowship & hope you will be eager to participate!

Another blessing has been learning of the amazing & diverse Acts of Mercy (charitable works) that occur here in our Diocese. Several parishes support tried & true humanitarian acts to aid those in need & the value of this work can not be understated. Others have done some rather unique projects that I’ve personally found fascinating that are geared to help those in need both near & far. One parish made reusable/washable feminine hygiene products for women in rural areas of Africa. Here on the home front, parishes stocked up with meals ready-to-go to be available to help families who find themselves in a crisis & in need. THIS is just one of the reasons why it is so valuable for us to get to know each other – *so we can learn from each other*. We’ve been blessed with countless gifts that need to be shared.

We’ve heard it said for multiple generations that the women are the backbones of our parishes. Although times have & continue to change – I believe this message evolves as well & yet remains true and exemplifies the strength that WE as women have in the building up & maintaining of our churches and church families.

With Love in Christ,

Charmaine E. Darmour
 President, Antiochian Women
 Diocese of LA & the West

A Heartfelt Letter to our Antiochian Women

by Melody Bahu of St. Luke Orthodox Church in Garden Grove, CA

My Dearest Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in our midsts!

I am sad to miss the PLC this year due to my health. I'm not sure if you remember me as the Public Relations officer or Membership Coordinator, or if we met at a Spring Retreat or any number of events, but I wanted to first say "thank you". Thank you for your prayers, your cards, your donations, your love and support. From the first day that I decided to attend a ladies event to every other time I was in the presence of an Antiochian Woman, I have felt welcomed. Even when I moved to New York for a year, the women at the Cathedral in Brooklyn made me feel at home.

I felt that it was important for me to share my journey with you not only because it is something that has/can affect us all, but because I love you as my sisters and want to empower you and those you love as well. I felt selfish for not sharing my diagnosis sooner but blessed to have the chance to do so now.

In July of 2017, my sister, Samira, who is 18 months older than me, felt a 3 centimeter lump in her right breast. After a number of tests and doctor appointments, by early September she received a positive diagnosis for invasive breast cancer, meaning it was already microscopically spreading in her body beyond the present tumor. She was scheduled to have surgery on October 9th, less than a month before her wedding. Obviously, it was heartbreaking. But thank God, she is a fighter and stayed positive and had a successful surgery. Her diagnosis led me to want to get genetic testing done and my own breasts examined, even though I had just been checked in May and was given a clean bill of health. We also have a family history of breast cancer on our mother's side; our grandmother (49 years old) and great grandmother (early 80s'), both passed away from it.

After my own few weeks of testing and waiting, on October 24th a 5.4 centimeter lump was found, ironically in my right breast too! It was a very aggressive form of invasive breast cancer. My sister literally saved my life because if she did not find her lump, I probably would not have gotten checked for another year and who knows how advanced my cancer would have gotten and to where it would have spread. I waited for her wedding to pass to share the news with my family and waited for my sister to return from her honeymoon to share it with her and her husband. That is when I was able to return the favor of saving her life.

Her doctors at City of Hope encouraged her to do 4 rounds of chemotherapy without ordering any body scans (PET or CT scans). I suggested that she meet with my doctors at USC/Hoag for a second opinion. My doctor ordered a full body scan and we found out that her cancer had metastasized (spread) to her liver. She decided to change doctors and move forward with a new treatment of 8 rounds of chemo. This was, indeed, another moment of wonder that we had of what would have happened if she did not treat the 3 centimeter tumor on her liver. Thank God we found it and were able to get her treatment for it.

I started my 6 rounds of chemo (every 3 weeks) on December 5, 2017 and finished on March 20, 2018. I had 4 medications injected in me via portacath on my chest. My sister and I both had our outpatient surgeries for our portacaths on the same day in January. On April 27th I underwent surgery for a double mastectomy. I am currently undergoing 28 rounds of radiation which will be completed on July 24th, my Saint's day (St Christina of Tyre). I will have a fat grafting surgery on August 15th, which is the Dormition of our blessed Theotokos and my final surgery will be on December 5th, which was the first day I started chemo last year and the feast day for St Barbara. All of these dates were randomly selected by my physicians, but in my heart I know that it was God's way of telling me that I was being watched over by the Saints and that He was watching over my family and I.

I never feared this journey of healing cancer from my body because of my faith. I have always felt a strong presence in my life of the Lord and His love and I accepted this challenge and for His will to be done. I was grateful that I was blessed to find it at a young age when I am strong and healthy, when I

don't have children or a husband to take care of or worry over me. My only fear was that I would get through this year and not change. But through the grace of God, I was changed and continue to do so.

How? I had a moment one day when I was really sick and in pain. I became emotional and was "talking" to God and it occurred to me that in my loneliness of trying to "save" my loved ones from seeing me in this state and partially being in denial that this was my reality, I was hindering all of us from blessings. I never realized that being so independent was a form of pride. Sometimes as women, we want to "do it all" and it can be difficult to ask for help or let others see us vulnerable. I realized that I needed to let others be there for me and by not giving them a chance, I was standing in the way of their salvation. I wasn't allowing them to be a blessing to me and "to visit the sick".

My journey has been very challenging yet fulfilling. I have been blessed to meet so many amazing women throughout the country who have walked before me through cancer. They were kind enough to share their stories, love and support. I have connected with some of their families and seen so much love and strength. I have also experienced the sorrow of attending funerals of these beautiful souls, two were active women in our diocese: Caren Deeb Kouri and Reham Nassar Turk. May their Memories be Eternal. I am working on trying to give back and be an advocate and support to other women and families touched by cancer. I would love to open the conversation within our community on how we can support one another and bring more awareness of being proactive as well as share our stories to help those who are struggling. If you have questions or want to connect please feel free to call, email, text or message me. I look forward to continuing this journey and pray that I will see you all soon.

With love,

Melody Bahu

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Let's connect on Facebook or Instagram: @MelodyBahu

GoFundMe: <https://www.gofundme.com/standwithmelody>

Blog: <https://authenticperspective.wordpress.com/>



May St. Christina of Tyre
intercede for Melody and
her family!

A Remote and Uplifting Retreat

by Jennifer Medders and Rachel Arnold
of St. John Orthodox Cathedral in Eagle River, Alaska

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

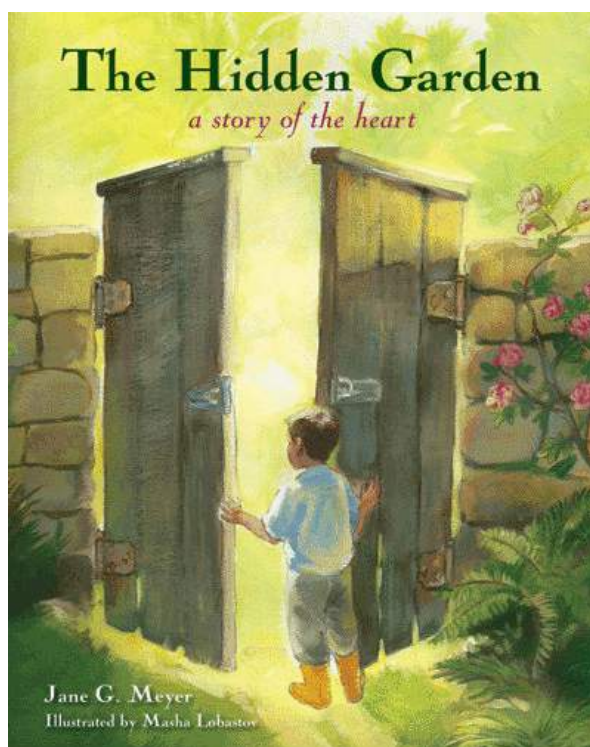
-Psalm 139:24

HELLO TO ALL FROM YOUR NORTHERNMOST SISTERS! The Sisters of Mary & Martha Society at St. John Orthodox Cathedral in Eagle River, AK enjoyed a wonderful time of learning, relaxation and fellowship at our Post-Paschal retreat this year. We've found that a retreat shortly after Pascha is a great fit, since the season of Lent can be so busy for us all. We are excited to share about our experience!



At the retreat, we focused on exploring the relationship between emotional health and our spiritual lives. As we explored the “Hidden Garden of our Heart”, which was the theme of our retreat, we were gifted with many excellent learning and sharing opportunities. This year we gathered in Whittier, AK at the beautiful Inn at Whittier. The staff was extremely friendly and accommodating, as is everyone in the small town. The only way to drive to Whittier is via the 13,300 feet long Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel through Maynard Mountain. Both trains and vehicles use the tunnel at alternating times. Now that’s truly a retreat! It is a town rich in history, as the area was developed during World War II. There are a few delicious eateries, shops, and another small inn for visitors to stay at as well as camping opportunities! Whittier has numerous trails, one of which leads you straight to Portage Glacier. The glaciers, wildlife, and breathtaking views of Prince William Sound really calm the soul.

We read excerpts from a children's book, The Hidden Garden: a Story of the Heart by Jane G. Meyer, and from Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald's book, Person's in Communion: a Theology of Authentic Relationships. We watched a TED talk by Nobel Peace Prize winner Jaak Panksepp, which explored the physiology, biochemistry and neurology of emotions. We watched a news report about "Broken Heart Syndrome", which really illustrated how there are real physical effects if the emotional part of us is not cared for. We read excerpts from Running on Empty: Overcoming Your Childhood Emotional Neglect, by Jonice Webb, It's Not Always Depression by Hilary Jacobs Hendel, To Open One's Heart by Michel Evdokimov, and The Inner Voice of Love, by Henri Nouwen. Between our readings and discussions, we were able to relax, enjoy our time together, and feel the peace that being surrounded by nature brings.



Below is a summary of the weekend, written by Rachel Arnold. Rachel is in her twenties, a member at Saint John Orthodox Cathedral, and we are very thankful for her willingness to share her experience at the retreat.

I felt caught up in a flurry of activity as this year's women's retreat approached. I almost didn't make the trip. In the end, I decided to go, and I'm very glad I did. We spent the weekend in beautiful Whittier, Alaska, a town only accessible by boat or by driving through a mountain (tunnel). It was just beginning to be spring, the air still chilly, and

unmelted snow in the shadows. Usually, I would go somewhere like Whittier to explore and hike. This time I experienced staying in the lovely "Inn at Whittier" with a wonderful group of women from St. Johns. We spent much of our time indoors, as the weather was very gray and wet. I did get out on a fast walk with one woman who is new to our church though, and we saw a bald eagle catch another bird in the harbor!



The topic of discussion for our gatherings was our emotions, something I rarely discuss or even let myself feel and work through in my daily life. It was hard for me to be there because I felt like the loser who has a "problem relationship with her emotions." But hearing the other women speak about how they have dealt with emotions in the past and learned various lessons was really inspiring. I am on the younger side (still in my mid 20s) and unmarried, so it was encouraging to hear so many different stories. Some ladies spoke about their relationships with husbands and children, and some even went back into their own childhood, speaking about things that affected their emotional development. In between discussions we enjoyed good food provided by the inn, and much fellowship. I learned a lot, and I look forward to catching up with some of the women at church during the year before the next retreat is upon us! Having a retreat together is an important ministry and a good way to make friends and I hope to continue participating in the years to come.

“The Myrrhbearers”: Antiochian Women of St. Andrew

The Antiochian Women of St. Andrew, known as “The Myrrhbearers”, dedicate their time and effort to serving the parish and community in a variety of ways. They are an outstanding group of women who are prepared and willing to serve where needed.

The Myrrhbearers serve the parish and community by teaching Sunday School, preparing the Sunday Agape Meals, organizing meals for the homeless, preparing Mercy meals, homeschool co-op, sewing vestments and baptismal robes, coordinating prosphora and artoklasia baking and communion wine offering, kitchen maintenance, welcoming committee and scheduling ushers.

In February, the Myrrhbearers organized their *Third Annual Valentine's Dinner and Dance*. Mighty Oak BBQ catered it with an outstanding dinner, DJ Cova played lively music, Nektarios Pla decorated the hall creating a romantic atmosphere, and Elizabeth Beck serenaded everyone with live music on the harp. Babysitting was provided for those with young children. Many said they had a wonderful evening. It was a night to remember!



In March, the Myrrhbearers held their “*20th Annual Annunciation Tea*” for the ladies of the parish and their guests. The tea included live music by Elizabeth Beck on the Harp as well as choral presentations from the St. Andrew Girls’ Choir, Teen Choir and an Adult Ladies Ensemble. The guest speaker, Father Calinic Berger from St. Nicholas Cathedral in LA, gave a beautiful and encouraging

homily on the Annunciation. It was a lovely afternoon of fellowship, tasty finger foods and lots of tea! Also, for the first time this year the event ended with a special procession and adornment of the Icon of the Annunciation at Vespers.

This year MANY of the Myrrhbearers chaired or helped on committees for our 25th Anniversary Banquet. A Commemorative Tile Wall Chaired by Suzie Wahbeh, (who was also a Co-Chair of the event) generated a lot of interest. Sonia Ruben and her committee made 55 silent auction baskets for the auction. The most baskets we've ever had! Barbara Ball and Lucy Hanna produced the Souvenir Journal with many memories from our 25 years. Lulu Khoury organized the Lenten Bake Sale with wonderful goodies. Many others, decorated, baked, cooked, served and cleaned up after a beautiful banquet. On to our next 25 years! Our Lucy Hanna was honored with The Order of St. Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn Silver Award for all her years of dedicated service to the Orthodox Church and to St. Andrew Church in particular. May God grant her many years!

During this year's Lenten season, many ladies participated in the Secret Angels where each Sunday in the month of March "Secret Angels" would bring a letter of encouragement for the lady they were assigned to. At the end of the month a potluck and gift exchange was held and the "Secret Angels" were revealed. It was a great way for the ladies of St. Andrew to form new connections and encourage each other.

The Myrrhbearers have had a wonderful and blessed year. We hope to continue to grow and flourish in the years to come.



**Articles, Interviews,
and our Prayer List
can be found on our**



Antiochian Women DLAW Blog

<https://antiochianwomenblog.wordpress.com>

The purpose of this blog is to reach out to the women in our diocese, and to encourage each other to read Orthodox articles written by clergy and laity from Orthodox perspective. The blog will be updated every Sunday morning, and on the last Sunday of each month there will be an article written by one lady from our Antiochian Women's group, which will discuss a personal story about "how God touches us in our life, and if there were time where we strongly felt or experienced His presence, love and providence". There is no doubt that we all have stories to share, and that would be a huge blessing to strengthen each other in our journey of faith, and to support each other. Our beloved spiritual advisor, Father David Hovik is contributing great church Father quotes every Sunday, which will appear on the top of the blog.

Your Sister in Christ,

Ramona Blanski
Religious Coordinator, Antiochian Women-Diocese of LA & the West

ACTS OF MERCY AROUND OUR DIOCESE

In Hebrews 13:16 we are told, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” In every corner of our Diocese the Antiochian Women are busy fulfilling “Acts of Mercy” for those in need. The good works being done are both numerous & very diverse. As with all aspects of our ministry, let’s take time to learn from each other & see if the good works done by our sisters might be an option for your parish community.

Here is just a small sampling of a few of the countless Acts of Mercy happening around our Diocese...

Holy Virgin Mary in West Sacramento, CA

- ❖ On a pilgrimage to St. Herman of Alaska Monastery they took articles of warm clothing, food & toiletries for the Monks.
- ❖ They raised funds for a mother in their neighborhood who suffered the unimaginable loss of the murder of her 3 children by her spouse. Memory Eternal!
- ❖ Together with their Teen SOYO they cooked & provided food to the hungry on the streets.



St. Thomas in Snohomish, WA

- ❖ They collected and sent baby supplies to “Zoe for Life” – an Orthodox support organization that helps women during crisis pregnancies and/or seeking to adopt.
- ❖ Provided freezer meals for “Cocoon House” a shelter for homeless teens
- ❖ Participated in the Project Mexico “Santa’s Helper” with Christmas gifts for a young man at the orphanage

St. Luke in Garden Grove, CA

- ❖ Collected shoes with the neighboring Greek parish for the Orange County Rescue
- ❖ Held a raffle that benefitted 3 California monasteries
- ❖ Monetary gifts to the 10 seminarians from our Diocese

Holy Cross in Yakima, WA

- ❖ During the Nativity fast they participate in the “Pantry Partners” program that Project Mexico has established. If able to collect 20 boxes of goods that are listed on their needs list, they have a delivery service that donates their services to transport the boxes to Project Mexico. Every year we meet and exceed this requirement
- ❖ Support of a local mission to provide roughly 50 sandwiches on a weekly basis with all supplies donated. Helping with making the sandwiches are their school children.

St. Michael in Van Nuys, CA

- ❖ Each year our Annunciation Tea proceeds are donated to St. Barbara Monastery
- ❖ Lenten Dinner free will donations go to support of our adopted child in Lebanon, part of the Children's Relief Program
- ❖ Chili Cook-off in support of FOCUS Feeding Hungry Children program



St. Timothy in Fairfield, CA

- ❖ On-going schedule participating with preparing and serving meals at a homeless shelter to about 80 persons
- ❖ “Bags of Blessings” for those in need are filled & then distributed that include non-perishable toiletry items, gift cards & brochures on our Orthodox faith
- ❖ Provided funds for the youth/young adults to serve at the San Francisco Ronald McDonald House of Charity (RMHC). This service entails individuals bringing groceries and preparing a meal at RMHC kitchen for approximately 60 individuals. The intention with this service project is to promote the VOCATIONS theme within our budding youth, to share the love of Christ with others.

A Reflection

by Sarah Gillis Machnee of St. Vincent Orthodox Church in Saskatoon, SK

Several years ago I was asked to write an article on marriage. In it, I recalled our wedding day and, in particular, the priest rushing through the holy doors to place our crowns of martyrdom on the altar. I remembered the peace and resolution with which I anticipated the life those crowns prophesied for us.

When I look back at the woman I was ten years ago on my wedding day, I see a girl full of enthusiasm and confidence. I was aware that there would be struggle in the life that I chose, but I was sure that I was ready to take on whatever married life could bring. I was confident in myself and in my faith in God. I thank God that He blessed me with such joy and comfort as I embarked on this new journey because it helped my husband and me begin our married life grounded in our love for God and the church when we needed it the most. Now, though, I am beginning to understand more about the concept of martyrdom, and how it is so necessary for humans in order to grow closer to God.

As any married couple can attest to, our first year was full of learning, which is when the struggle of married life began. For example, I learned that I wasn't a very good cook, and Terry (my husband) learned how to lovingly communicate that to me! I also learned that my fasting and prayer look different from Terry's. I was shocked that he would eat eggs on a Wednesday in order to have energy for the day. I was ashamed of myself later when I learned that he would deny himself other things in secret.

These little realizations about myself began making little jabs at my confidence. Over the years, and as the children have come along (5 of them within 6 years!), my stores of enthusiasm and confidence have begun to be depleted. I have had to rely on help from others (especially when I had my twins.) Before I had children, I was full of opinions about how children ought to behave, and how they should be disciplined. But then I had my own and everything I thought I knew was challenged. My children, while they bring me much joy and fulfillment, also bring me to the end of myself. I am tired, humiliated, and at a loss for how to respond to their constant and ever changing needs. This form of martyrdom has brought me to a knowledge of my weakness, which causes me to look up to God for help, rather than depend on my own strength.

Before I had children I was confident in my faith but, with pregnancy and nursing, I've had periods of time when I was too overwhelmed to attend church services and too weak to fast. I started to feel discouraged and distanced from the church and from God and began to wonder if I was still really an Orthodox Christian since I was not participating in the life of the church. And this is when I realized how self-righteous I am! I had forgotten that my relationship with Christ is not determined by how well I fast, or how many liturgies I attend. I had been mistaking outward piety for a genuine relationship with God.

I look at myself today and I see a woman who is not sure of anything anymore. I am beginning to understand that much of the self confidence and enthusiasm that I had when I was younger was misplaced in the outward actions of my faith, like attending church often and fasting and having a regular rule of prayer. Now, as a mother and wife, I feel like I am starting out again on my spiritual journey, but without any of the vigor of my youth. Rather, it is as a child trusting in the unconditional love of my Father, who loves me even when I have nothing to give Him in return, except myself. At the end of myself is where I have begun to find God.



Breakfast at St. Nicholas: A Mother's Day Brunch

by Joyce Ayob and Concetta Smarius of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA

The St. Nicholas Cathedral Ladies Society held their annual Mother's Day event on Saturday, May 12 at the Heritage Ballroom. This year's theme was "Breakfast at St. Nicholas", inspired by the Audrey Hepburn movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Over 150 were in attendance, including clergy and members from our sister parishes in Van Nuys and Valencia.

The tables were decorated with "Tiffany Blue" bags filled with white hydrangeas draped with pearls and iconic black sunglasses, crystal-filled champagne glasses and mini Tiffany boxes with a treasured See's chocolate truffle inside. A delicious brunch was served, which included a granola bar and a hot breakfast buffet. Guests enjoyed "Momosas" at the bar, served by our Men's Society, while they shopped with various local vendors of handbags, essential oils, and other amenities. Group pictures were taken in front of a backdrop of a duplicated Tiffany gift bag.

The highlight of the day was the raffle, which included many restaurant certificates, spa and numerous gift cards with the grand prize a \$500 gift certificate to Tiffany's, which was won by Joan Tintocalis.

Thank you to the many generous donors who contributed to the event!



Photos from Around Our Diocese



The women of Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Ben Lomand visit Holy Assumption Monastery.



Ladies in West Sacramento preparing for a Palm Sunday Bake Sale!



Women in Northern California enjoying a Lenten Retreat.



"The Myrrhbearers" in Riverside, CA prepare spinach pies.²¹



Generations of women enjoying the Annunciation Tea at St. Barnabas in Costa Mesa, CA.



The women of St. Mark Church in Irvine, CA read the Epistle during Women's Month.



Antiochian Women's Book Club meeting at St. Luke in Garden Grove, CA.



The Ladies at St. Nicholas Cathedral preparing for their Annual Palm Sunday Bake Sale.



“Meal Train Ministry” preparations in Costa Mesa,



More spinach pies in Torrance, CA!



Advent Outreach Project: A Ministry in Pictures

by Lajarle Scott of St. John Cathedral in Eagle River, AK

Our women's group led the St. John's Women's Advent Outreach Project in December. We took 2 vehicle loads of hats, gloves, socks, sleeping bags, and blankets to our local Gospel Rescue Mission, which helps the homeless. We also made 75 Blessing Bags that we distributed to the homeless in our area.

Each Blessing Bag had a pack of beef jerky, applesauce, chapstick, hand warmers, and an icon card with a scripture handwritten on it. As you can see from the pictures, we had women working on writing the handwritten scripture and stuffing the Blessing Bags. The Gospel Rescue Mission was very appreciative of all of the donated items!



A Retreat of Peace

by Erica Reagan of St. Luke Garden Grove, CA

I was facing burnout of epic proportions. I'm sure many people can relate to the feeling of burning the candle at both ends. It's a common tale for humanity. We reach a place where we suddenly feel like there's not much left to give because we have become an empty shell. Our lives are busy and there are constant demands on our time, energy, and resources. I personally am a homeschooling mother of five children under the age of eight. I probably don't need to add that, while it is the best work I'll ever do in my whole life, it is incredibly chaotic, time consuming, and both physically and spiritually exhausting.

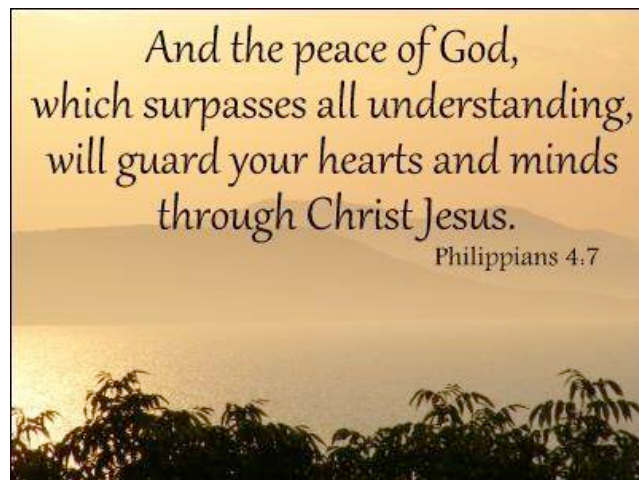
My mom, Kh. Laurie Olson, and I were texting one day and I was venting over the fact that I had slept less than 6 hours total in the last three days. She invited me to the St. Nicholas Women's Retreat to recharge. As many moms do, I felt that taking time away would be impossible to achieve, and I was accompanied by feelings of guilt for leaving my children for a couple of days. However, my husband wisely encouraged me to take the time to reconnect with God, nature, and other Orthodox women.

The retreat's topic happened to be “The Peace of God That Surpasses All Understanding.” The moment I heard this was the verse we'd be meditating on, I had chills. My favorite book of the bible is Philippians and that very verse hangs in our dining room. *“Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation with prayer and thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.”* I look at this verse numerous times a day and sometimes it feels ironic that I happened to pick that particular one to hang in my house. Three years ago, I had been diagnosed with depression and Anxiety with a capital A. I've suffered panic attacks, migraines, and insomnia. It's difficult for me to take life one day at a time, and often taking it just one hour at a time is challenging enough. I would consider this peace I was always in search of and I worked hard to find it, but I often felt powerless to find it among all of the continual physical exhaustion I faced from the reality of my life. I was always discouraged and felt lost, like there was something spiritually wrong with me for having these struggles.

Fr. Nicholas Speier's lectures were like chicken soup to my exhausted and battered heart and soul. How does one find peace in the midst of all one's brokenness and pain? What do we do when we are stressed to the point of burnout? How can we deal with rejection, loss, sickness, betrayals, and all the other troubles we deal with in our messy lives and still find peace? I asked Fr. Nicholas this and he listened compassionately and said, "We will never be free of our pain but we can bring God into it. Tell God, 'Lord, I'm hurting' and bring Him close to you. Cry to Him. Tell Him your sadnesses. Turn this emotional energy into spiritual energy." Christ suffered all these things and more - even to death. Fr. Nicholas reminded me of the Bridegroom Icon and what Christ was going through at that moment during His trials - there is nothing you are going through that Christ cannot understand. "Be honest with God about your problems and struggles. Tell Him everything."

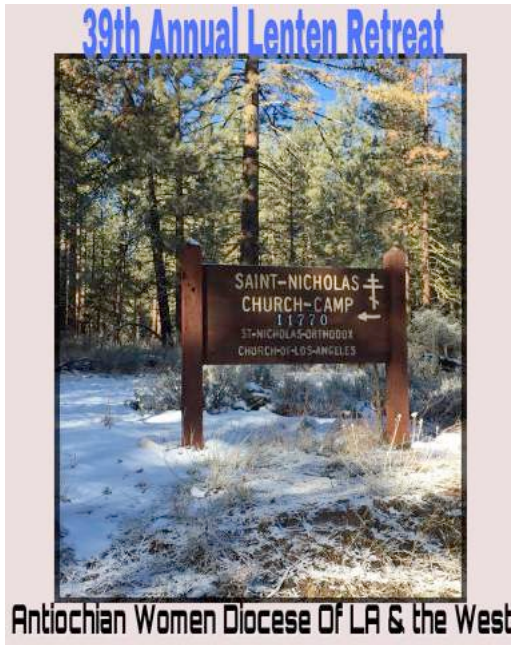
Fr. Nicholas encouraged me to look to the example of St. Thomas, who was honest about his disbelief of the resurrection but never fled. Thomas turned his emotional energy into spiritual energy and it drew him closer to Christ. Our problems should lead us immediately into communion with God as "*All things work together for good.*" (Romans 8) Christ is where we can find peace - bringing our troubles to Him is the method by which we seek and pursue peace, and nothing can take our relationship with Christ away. As Fr. Jon Braun said, "*What then can happen that can thwart it?*"

I am very thankful for the women who worked so hard to make this retreat happen and for Fr. Nicholas' care, compassion, and wisdom. It was a healing weekend. I was surrounded by so many lovely women whom I was so fortunate to meet and get to know. I was inspired by practical words of spiritual wisdom, was able to pray peacefully, and was immersed in beautiful surroundings. I felt that much of my weariness was tended to and I was able to return to the beautiful mess that is my life with thanksgiving and peace.



Our Annual Lenten Retreat at Camp St. Nicholas

March 16 - 18, 2018



Antiochian Women Diocese Of LA & the West



Our inspirational speaker, Fr. Nicholas Speier!



The snow began to fall...and fall...AND fall!



Fr. David censes the congregation.



Helping Sisters Across the Globe

by Judy Pappoff of St. Luke in Garden Grove, CA



Our women (of all ages) are involved in a continuing humanitarian sewing project. We are making reusable menstrual pads for teens and women in Entebbe, Uganda. They do not have easy access to the paper based products that we have, nor do they have the means to deal with all the waste involved with disposables.

We gathered together one Saturday at St. Luke in Garden Grove, and we cut, sewed, turned right-side-out, and pressed. We pulled quilting cottons and flannels from our stashes and some purchased fabrics just for this project. We also use a special fabric, called PUL, which is the moisture barrier. So far we have completed over 100 pads. They are quite colorful!



The women are able to wash, dry, and re-use many times. In addition to being so productive, we had a great day of fellowship, chatting, collaborating, and of course, we ate! Some of our women are continuing to work on these at their homes.



This is a continuing project, actually sent to Entebbe with my cousins who are nurses and they hand six pads to each recipient. If you or your group are interested in making some of these to be sent on the next trip, send an e-mail to jpappoff@hotmail.com. I will send the instructions.

 *Sisterhood*

HAVE YOU “LIKED” US YET????



**Antiochian Women Diocese of Los Angeles
& the West**

Religious Organization
435 like this

✓ Liked ▼



Antiochian Women North America

Religious Organization · 845 like this

We are a Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others. Our members are all [Antiochian Orthodox women](#) over the age of 18 in t...

✓ Liked ▼



**Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of North America**

Eastern Orthodox Church
Religious Organization
7,549 like this

✓ Liked ▼

KEEP UP WITH US ON FACEBOOK!

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Antiochian Women Prayer

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

Amen.

