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# ❖ THE TORCHBEARER ❖

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Vol. 6 ... No. 5

January, 1999

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## ***From the Pastor...***

Beloved in Christ:

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

One of the most misunderstood and abused sacraments, in my opinion, is baptism. For some, baptism is a social event to show off their baby; for others, it is done to satisfy the demands placed on us by our parents or society: “It’s the thing to do.” Who could forget that wonderful TV show “All in the Family.”? We all remember that lovable rogue Archie Bunker and his “dingbat” wife Edith. For those who watched and remember the show, you know that Archie never, ever attended church. He didn’t even remember the name of his minister. Yet, when his daughter and her husband informed Archie that his new born grandson wasn’t going to get baptized, didn’t he attempt or threatened (I don’t remember if he actually did) to take the child himself to church to have him baptized? Why?

In my opinion, many people view baptism, as they do most sacraments as a magic trick. Have the priest say a few words, put some oil on the baby’s head, and presto! A new Christian! How sad! Often when I have baptisms (and funerals and weddings too) I see parishioners whom I really don’t know or may have never even seen. They may not have attended the Divine Liturgy or received the life giving body and blood of Christ in years, but when a baptism is held they are there - with camera and video camera in hand. Godparents are chosen because they are our friends or relatives - not because they are living the Christian life. The baptism is completed, the

people go to the church hall or to a restaurant for lunch and in most cases, we never see these people again or at least not until their child is ready to start church school.

In his book All the Fullness of God, Fr. Thomas Hopko, who is the Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, says “If there are no adults to care for the children’s spiritual life and churchly upbringing, then it is normally understood by the Orthodox that such children ought not be baptized. Baptism is not magic. It is not an act in which something happens to a person in isolation from the ongoing life of the Church into which the person is born in the baptismal mystery. The Orthodox Church has never taught (except in some westernized catechisms) that persons who have not been sacramentally baptized cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Nor has it been the teaching that unbaptized ‘innocents,’ particularly children can have only ‘natural’ and not ‘supernatural’ happiness after death. What happens ultimately to the sacramentally unbaptized, as to the baptized, is known to God alone who sees and judges, every life. God decides each person’s eternal; destiny, according to His providence...” If the above is the teaching of the Church, which should be followed by Her members, then why baptize children?

Fr. Thomas goes on to say that “Christians who practice their faith and participate in the sacramental life of the Church will baptize the children in their care so that they may be delivered from the power of sin, death and the devil...Christians baptize their children in order to bring them into the gracious life of the Church, which is the Kingdom of God on earth. They baptize their children and feed them with the Bread of Christ the Savior.”

You may ask why I am writing about baptism. You may say, “Shouldn’t you tell this to the parents who



call you to baptize their child?" I do. I write about this for two reasons: first, to challenge us to take all of the sacraments seriously. To see them as being related to all that we do at Church, not to see them as magic totally divorced from the life of the Church. When we marry, confess, ordain, etc., we do so as part of the whole Church, with everything interrelated. How can we baptize a child and never bring that child back to Church? How can we marry and never (except when we have our crowns removed or have children) come to Church? So many of us are "out of shape" spiritually that the Church is simply seen as something cute that connects us to our past here or in the "old country." The second reason I write this is on behalf of our children.

I am a firm believer that children should be attending the Divine Liturgy. As you may know, Church school starts after Communion. Some parents don't like this (though many do) and some older parishioners don't like this. Some think that children should be "hidden." However, as Fr. Hopko says "in the Orthodox Church, baptized and chrismated children are invited to participate in the liturgical celebration of the holy Eucharist because they are members of Christ's body, the Church....According to the scriptures as traditionally interpreted by the Orthodox, Jesus Himself willed the inclusion of children into the saving life of His Church. He is found on the pages of the evangelical writings rebuking His disciples with great indignation for forbidding the children to come to Him." As Christ commands to the children to be with him, it is so very vital that all adults, parents and non-parents encourage the children when they come to Church. People think that the Divine Liturgy is "their" time with God. Nothing could be further from the truth!! When you want to pray to God alone you do so when you are alone; however, when you come to the Liturgy you are entering the gathering of the people of God. Hence, children, by virtue of their baptism - their initiation into the Body of Christ, are full members and participants in this gathering. As one priest once said, "children make holy noise."

There are a few suggestions that I would like to make to parents that would aid them in making Church a more meaningful experience. Some of the things that you can do are: say prayers before meals and bedtime, celebrating the child's "namesday,"

getting to church on time and sitting up front so that they can see, teaching them about the feasts and fasts of the Church (such as bringing a cross on the Sundays of the Cross or an icon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy), reading them Bible stories from a children's Bible, and being an example for them. The following argument is an old one but it still is true. The argument is: Church School is only 45 minutes long. You have the children the rest of the time. Church school exists ONLY to supplement and reinforce what you are teaching your children. If you only bring the children on the Sundays when Church School is in session, if you aren't even trying to live a life worthy of our high calling, if you don't keep the fasts and feasts, then how can you blame the priest, the church school, or even the child if they stop coming to the Church if you yourself don't make it a priority? A wise old priest once told me that "the people who complain the loudest about the teens or young adults not coming to Church are the ones whose own children don't come." I can hear some parents already, "He doesn't know what he's talking about." Oh but I do! Don't forget that I have three children, age 8, 6, and 4, and my wife is by herself on Sunday mornings. But my wife and I invest our time and energy because our children's salvation and ours is at stake. What I am suggesting is not easy, but it is worth it!!

The Church is full of beauty and truth. The Church is the home not only to God but also to the angels and the gathering of the saints. Your child is so precious. Children look to us for love, food, shelter, and a foundation based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. All of us are doing our children a great disservice if we don't give our children the faith of our fathers and a faith to call their own - to give them strength, solace, and comfort - The Holy Orthodox Church!

If I can help you or your family with anything, I stand ready to help. I offer the above because I care about you. As I have said many times before, if I didn't care about you or your spiritual life, I would keep silent. But as St. Paul says, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:16) Asking remembrance in your holy and God pleasing prayers, I remain,

Your co worker in our Lord's vineyard,

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebagy

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## ***From the Chairman...***

I hope and pray that this edition of the torchbearer finds you and your family in good health. Christ is Born, Glorify Him.

The celebration of our 91<sup>st</sup> Anniversary was a relaxing and enjoyable time. A special thanks to the Church School Guild and our Sunday School students for a wonderful Christmas Pageant and luncheon. The "Birthday Party" of the Church, hosted by John Shagoury and committee, was a well received change of pace.

Again, the parishioners of St. John's showed the true meaning of Christmas. Through your generosity, 89 underprivileged families will enjoy gifts this Holiday season, through our Angel Tree. Thank you to all who participated.

Olivia Waishek and committee have an enjoyable evening planned for our Annual Art Auction on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

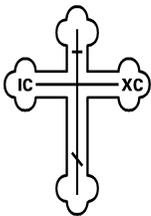
If you have any suggestions or ideas please do not hesitate to bring them to the attention of the Executive Board. We want you to feel free to approach any Board Member, including Fr. John, with your comments.

May God Bless You,

Robert P. Zahka  
Chairman of the Executive Board

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## ***Church Records...***



***"As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."***

Jarred Michael Saber, son of John and Karen (Day) Saber of Mansfield, MA was baptized on November 29, 1998.

***Many Years!!***

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***"Blessed are they whom thou has chosen and taken O Lord!"***

Peter George (90) of West Roxbury, MA fell asleep in the Lord on November 24, 1998. He is survived

by his daughter and her family. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park, MA.

Edward George Mudarri (74) of Auburndale, MA fell asleep in the Lord on December 5, 1998. He is survived by his daughter, two sons, and their families and his sister. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park, MA .

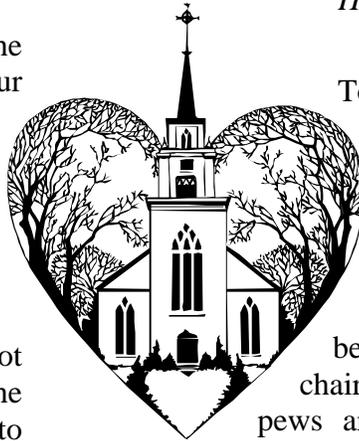
***Memory Eternal!!***

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## **No Excuse Sunday**

*Humor is a proof of faith.*

Charles M. Schulz



To make it possible for everyone to attend church next Sunday, we are going to have a special "No Excuse Sunday." Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." There will be a special section for lounge chairs for those who feel that our pews are too hard. Eyedrops will be available for those with tired eyes from watching TV late Saturday night. We will have steel helmets for those who say, "The roof would cave in if I ever came to church." Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church is too cold and fans for those who say it is too hot. Scorecards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. Relatives and friends will be in attendance for those who can't go to church and cook dinner, too. We will distribute "Stamp Out Stewardship" buttons for those who feel that the church is always asking for money.

One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to seek God in nature. Doctors and nurses will be in attendance for those who plan to be sick on Sunday. The sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who never have seen the church without them. We will provide hearing aids for those who can't hear the priest and cotton for those who can.

Author Unknown  
From the Joyful Noiseletter

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## ***Announcements***

- The Feast of Theophany, which is January 6<sup>th</sup>, will be observed on January 3<sup>rd</sup> with the traditional Blessing of Water. All are urged to come celebrate this feast and drink the life giving waters of Theophany.
- Bishop BASIL's name's day is on January 1<sup>st</sup>. If you would like to send him greetings, you can write to him at: Bishop BASIL, 1559 North Woodlawn, Wichita, KS 67208-2429.
- Bishop ANTOUN name's day is on January 17<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to send him greetings, you can write to him at: Bishop ANTOUN, 358 Mountain Road, Englewood, N.J. 07631
- If you would like Fr. John to visit your home to bless it, kindly return the form by Thursday, December 31<sup>st</sup>. If you have not yet received this form, or have misplaced it, please call the church office. Thank you!
- 1999 Pledge Forms must be returned by December 31<sup>st</sup> so that we may update our pledge records and accurately plan the budget for the upcoming year. Please be sure to check your January 1999 Pledge statement for the pledge amount given. If the annual pledge is incorrect, please call the church office.
- The Fellowship of St. John the Divine will be holding their annual Bake Sale on Sunday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, proceeds to benefit the Children's Relief Fund...sponsorship of Nina Nasr.
- Syrian Lebanese Women's Club of Greater Boston will once again be offering scholarship awards of \$1,000 to academically talented women, of Arab American origin residing in Massachusetts within a 50-mile radius of Boston, planning to pursue a 4-year college education. The awards are made to high school seniors or college freshmen on the basis of financial need, academic achievement and good character. The application may be obtained by calling Rose Maloof at (617) 484-3844 or Laurice Kurker at (781) 643-7991. **All completed applications must be returned no later than March 31, 1999.**

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## ***From the Parent Guild...***

With Christmas just days away, I'm sure that your household is much like my own... VERY BUSY. It was good planning that the Church School Christmas Pageant was held on December 5<sup>th</sup>. It was a joy to see the children of St. John's in the roles of Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, narrators, angels, shepherds, wise men and innkeepers. All parts were performed flawlessly and you couldn't have seen a better play, even on Broadway. All of this would not have been possible if not for Linda O'Hara and Debbie Leotsakos. Somehow, they found the time for organizing, assigning roles and practices. This, just after one week from their hard work at the Bazaar. They had help from many people and I would like to thank them all.

I would also like to thank the people who helped prepare the luncheon. The saying "many hands make light work" was evident that day. The luncheon was prepared in time for all to sit and enjoy the play. A special thanks to Elaine Sabbag. Without her help and guidance, it would have been difficult to put the luncheon on.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of St. John's a blessed and joyous Christmas. At this time of year we take time to thank God for all of our blessings, and I am very thankful for my family and my church family at St. John's.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Tawa, Guild President

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## ***From the Virgin Mary Society...***

Now that our Annual Bazaar is over, the Virgin Mary Society members have resumed their every day activities and can now prepare for the holiday season. It was very gratifying to see the many women who filled our kitchen every scheduled work day, ready to do their part in whatever was on the cooking or baking agenda that day. A special "Thank you" to all these devoted women who gave so many hours of their time in order to achieve the very profitable contribution we proudly added to the success of the 1998 Bazaar. This could not have been accomplished without the teamwork shown during our working months of September and October. Hopefully, next year will be the same!

Our 1999 Calendar of Events will include our annual Sfeeha Sale and Lenten Dinner. Details to follow at a later date.

Wishing you all a very happy and health Christmas and New Year!

Sincerely,  
Maryann Hamwey

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### ***From the Village Parents...***

Greetings! We hope that your holiday season is filled with joy, excitement and good health.

The Village Parents are sponsoring the Godparents' Luncheon on February 7<sup>th</sup>. Tickets will be sold beginning January 3<sup>rd</sup>. All tickets must be purchased in advance. There will be no tickets sold at the door. Please buy your tickets early. There will also be a Valentine's Gift Shop open during the luncheon, similar to what we had last year. This is a perfect time for you and your children to shop for your special Valentine. All proceeds from the luncheon and the Gift Shop will benefit the Antiochian Village Scholarship Fund.

We hope to hold a Walk-A-Thon in the spring. We are looking for ideas and suggestions on other fundraising events that we can hold. Please watch the bulletin for more information on the activities that will be held.

Please do not throw away your old Christmas cards! The Antiochian Village campers are going to recycle used Christmas cards. Please drop your cards off at church any Sunday in January. It is helpful but not necessary to cut the greeting off, as we will only be using the front of the cards. We will also be collecting canceled postage stamps. They may be turned in with your Christmas cards.

If you have any questions, please call Paula Hamwey at (978) 840-0559 or Chris Bezreh at (781) 449-1230 or see us during coffee hour.

We wish you all a very happy and healthy New Year.

The Village Parents

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Please be advised that the method of receiving Holy Communion adopted by the Archdiocese is to open your mouth wide, tip your head back slightly, and allow the priest or deacon to place the elements on your tongue. No contact with the spoon is necessary. Historically, it has been considered by the Church to be the most salutary method. We request that everyone comply with this instruction. Also, we ask that the congregation remain standing throughout the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Thank you.



### ***Pan Orthodox Singles of New England***

735 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

To provide its members an atmosphere of fellowship through communication, activities and worship. To enhance the purpose of the organization, social, cultural, spiritual, educational and other diversified activities will be offered to its membership. This organization has received the official blessings of His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios, the Diocese of Boston.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

This non-profit, social and religious organization is comprised of unmarried Eastern Orthodox Christians, regardless of jurisdiction, who are single, widowed or divorced and are age 30 and over. Business meetings are held at St. Athanasios Church, 735 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington, MA. Members are notified by mail, of meeting date and time. Social events will be held each month. For more information contact Nikki Bratsis at (781) 762-5584 or Maria Christina Panos at (781) 937-0029.

#### **MEMBERSHIP FORM 1999**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **1999 Yearly Dues \$20.00**

**Mail to:** Pan Orthodox Singles of New England, 735 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476

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**QUESTION:** I was wondering about the practice of churching moms and babies 40 days after birth. Why is the woman forbidden to come to church? Does it have to be 40 days? Some of the prayers seem to imply there is guilt associated with childbirth. Is this so?

**RESPONSE:** You have raised some good questions, but they betray some misunderstandings. First of all, it is not that the woman is forbidden to go church in particular. The ancient custom is for the new mother not to go *anywhere*: not shopping, not to restaurants, not visiting, or anywhere else. Why? It is a special time for her to stay at home, recuperate, and bond with her new baby. But nowadays, it is common for new moms to resume doing everything else in a matter of several days, going back to work, going to the gym, shopping, and all the rest. But somehow, the perception is that she is “forbidden” to attend the Liturgy and has to stay home week after week.

In view of this, many priests now allow a mother and baby to be churched sooner than the normal forty day period, say, after three weeks or so, if she is already resuming normal activity. In my opinion, it is senseless for her to go back to all her worldly activities but remain separated from the church community and the sacraments.

Other priests remain more strict about the traditional forty day period. Recent medical research has shown that the baby’s immune system is not fully developed until it is about six weeks old, i.e., about 40 days. So perhaps there is some ancient wisdom in the Church’s practice!

It is unfortunate that some people put a negative “spin” on this tradition, which is not an expression of a negative view of childbearing, but an expression of the Church’s compassion. Prayers that mention “cleansing” of the mother and ask for the forgiveness of her sins should not be taken to refer directly to the process of reproduction. Prayers for the sick also ask for the forgiveness of sins (as do most churchly prayers!), but this does not imply that the person’s sickness is caused by his sins! The practice of praying for forgiveness and cleansing is typical and general, and is not to be interpreted as a negative view of childbearing as sin or “uncleanness.”

The language of uncleanness regarding childbirth can resonate with distant echoes of the Old

Testament. But the Church’s prayer should not be seen in an Old Testament light. The practice of “churching” mother and baby is really the Church’s way of celebrating the woman’s re-entry to the community as a new mother and a rite of welcoming and blessing her child. It is performed after an appropriate period of rest, recuperation, and bonding. It is a beautiful custom! There is nothing negative about it, and the opinions of those who see it that way, whether ancient or modern, should be rejected.

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**QUESTION:** What can you tell me about Godparents? I hear about them a lot, but I’m afraid too many people just take the role for granted.

**ANSWER:** Godparents have been around since the earliest days of the Church. Initially their role was to vouch for the character of adults who were being baptized. They assured everyone that the person coming to the faith was serious about his or her obligations. The Godparent (who is the same sex as the candidate) would then assist the clergy at the baptism. After a few centuries though, infant baptism became the regular practice of the Church, so in addition to the Godparents’ role at the baptism, they also undertook the responsibility of guiding the moral and spiritual upbringing of the child. For these reasons, **Godparents must be Orthodox and in good standing with the Church.**

No Godparent should ever take their role lightly, or assume that they are simply a functionary during a christening. The Godparent’s role in the spiritual growth of a child is as important as that of the mother and father. Some of the things that Godparents do, aside from their presence at the baptism, is to take the child to Communion, visit them regularly, remember them on their name day and baptismal anniversary. The Godparents need to be a part of the lives of their Godchildren, assuring them of their love and teaching them about the faith. Most importantly, a Godparent needs to remember his or her spiritual children in daily prayer.

The spiritual bond between a Godmother or Godfather and the Godchild is very real and is very different than other relationships. For this reason parents and spouses cannot function as Godparents. Further, the relationship is so sacred that a Godparent would not be allowed to marry a Godchild (in the same way that blood relatives are not allowed to marry.)





Wishing you and yours a  
Happy and Healthy New Year!

**THE TORCHBEARER**

**is the Monthly Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus**

*A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebagy, Pastor

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**Services:** Sunday-Matins 9:00 a.m.,

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Church Office Hours...**

Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at noon.

Please plan accordingly.

**DEADLINE** for the **FEBRUARY TORCHBEARER**  
will be **January 10th.**

Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.

**Church of St. John of Damascus**  
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Dedham, MA 02026-5594

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