
THE TORCHBEARER

The Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus, Dedham, MA

November/December 2007

St. John's representative for the 2007 Oratorical Festival this past June was David Hazerjian of Walpole. David, a senior at Xaverian High School in Westwood, is the son of David and Carol (Zahka) Hazerjian. If you read David's oratory, you will agree that St. John's was well represented.

Unity is a beautiful idea; it is the creation of a wholesome structure and the building block of success, both spiritually and materially. Orthodox Christians in North America should embrace a unified Orthodox Church, an institution which dates back to Pentecost when, as written in Acts 2:4, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to spread the Word of Christ in the language of each person's homeland. Within that diversity the disciples were spreading a single, united message - that people should be baptized into Christianity. As told to us in Acts 2:44, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common."

The opposite of unity is division, the separation in which grievances between sides are commonly taken. Division too often leads to distrust and isolation, and within such an idea Christian virtues can many times be ignored and paid no honor. Every Sunday in Church we recite the Nicene Creed, the very set of beliefs that constitute the Church. Within the Nicene Creed is the statement "I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church." We believe in one Church and no more than that. However, in its current state, the Orthodox Church in North America is divided into twenty separate entities. Despite the close proximity that these jurisdictions share with each other, they remain in division. This is a clear contradiction to the principle beliefs of the Church. How can we possibly live in division when the Creed so explicitly states that we are one Church?

Presently in North America there are between two and three million Orthodox Christians. This is quite a large group and one that is worthy of popular recognition and respect. However, with the divisions in North American Orthodoxy, this group's power is quite meager, and popular recognition eludes our

Church. In my personal experience, I have come to notice that when the media covers important major issues, a Catholic or Protestant religious leader will commonly be called upon to voice the opinions of their Church on a given subject matter. I, unfortunately, have never had the pleasure to view an Orthodox priest or bishop being featured on any news broadcast of any sort. This is clearly a symptom of the problem that is the split of Orthodoxy in North America, and shows a belief by the community surrounding the various Orthodox churches in North America that there is insufficient influence and power held by our Church. United we could be strong and well-known, but separated we are viewed as something of a third class group in comparison to other Christian religions.

As Christians, we all are compelled to assist those in need, both materially and spiritually. Christ tells us in Luke 14:13 to “invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” to feast with us. We are being instructed to seek out those in need and to fill their needs with our Christian love. As actions are much more meaningful than words, it is essential that such acts of charity be performed in order for Christ’s love to be spread. Such acts, however, require fortitude and manpower beyond the will of just a few Christians. In order to attain such strength, we must unite with our fellow Orthodox sects. While we Antiochian may be able to serve the poor ourselves, and the Greeks or the Russians may be able to serve the poor themselves, we could much more effectively bring help to those in need if we bond together. A large combined effort would be much more effective than a number of smaller individual efforts in order to better accomplish this task of service that Christ has laid out for us. An example of this unified effort in action is the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). The IOCC was founded in 1992 as the humanitarian aid agency of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas. Since its inception, the IOCC “has implemented over \$226 million in relief and development programs in 30 countries around the world,” according to the *Word*, June 2007. What better way to follow Christ’s teachings than through the IOCC?

In the Orthodox Church of the Eastern Hemisphere, the different archdioceses declare their faith by the country in which they originated. The Antiochian Orthodox Church commenced in the area containing Antioch, the Greek Church originated in Greece, and the Russian Church is from Russia. The country of birth is taken as the country of faith for the archdiocese. By this logic, as a majority of Orthodox in this continent today were born in North America, we should take our archdiocesan faith to North America: our land of birth. It should be seen as a gift that in North America, we are able to coexist despite our differences. If we, the different Orthodox entities, can do this, then why can we

not coexist spiritually and join all into one church? Instead of taking this opportunity to further the power of our faith, we ignore it and remain divided and weaker. We should embrace this great chance to strengthen Orthodoxy in North America by uniting with our fellow Orthodox Churches.

In my personal experience, countless times I have observed the lack of a presence that Orthodoxy has in the minds of people of other faiths in North America. When discussing their religion, people in a group will tell each other that they are Catholic or Episcopalian or Jewish. None of these types of statements typically generate any odd questioning or bewilderment and they are generally accepted and understood by other people in a discussion. When I am asked my religion, however, many awkward questions often quickly arise. Upon saying that I am Orthodox, one may say to me something like “What’s that” or “Oh, so you’re Jewish.” I will then go into the explanation that I am in fact Christian. The fact that I even have to give such an explanation clearly makes a statement about the state Orthodoxy in North America. With two to three million members in North America, Orthodoxy should be well known. However, the divisions in it have kept it from gaining the attention that it deserves. If the Church unites and takes its status as a major faith in this part of the world, I will have more confidence in my faith. I will no longer have to anticipate the odd questions coming about after my announcement of my faith. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann wrote in Church, World, Mission, “the essential unity of the Orthodox world is neither national, nor political, nor even jurisdictional.” With the joining together of all Orthodox Archdioceses, I feel that I could derive more strength from my faith and could be proud and strong when I state that I am a member of the original Church.

Nothing can reach a state of solace and perfection when it is in a state of disjuncture. With the split between the different sects of the Orthodox Church, we are placed in a state of disjuncture and incompleteness and in such a state, we cannot be satisfied as Orthodox Christians. While we should be teaching others solidarity and neighborly love as Christ suggested, we ourselves are divided. This just should not be so; how can we act as a model and advocate for neighborly love and coming together while we are in separation from some of those who should be closest to us - other Orthodox Christians? In order for one to find spiritual peace, one cannot be in a divided state, and for the Church as a union of souls to reach solace, it must be whole!

If the Orthodox Church was one whole, blended institution, it could extend itself to all of its members. Antiochian Orthodox would not have to go at length to find a Church of their faith while there is a Greek Church nearby and vice versa. The Church’s voice would be strengthened if unified. The combined concentration

of presently different Orthodox Christians could take their numbers as strength, and in this solidarity, could more easily spread its message to the public. The church also would be able to spread the word of Christ more effectively in other ways. The unity could allow for a major ecumenical Orthodox radio station or television channel to come into being. Forms of spreading the word of Christ as this have been used by other faiths; with our uniting, we could put it into action.

As Metropolitan Philip wrote in March 1984, he asks us “to blend old and new cultures into some kind of an integrated reality.” In other words, we do not have to abandon our ethnic backgrounds, but rather we should join together to fulfill Christ’s mission. In Corinthians 12:12-13, St. Paul wrote, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...” That one body can be the Orthodox Church of North America, unified by the Holy Spirit as we were all chrismated into Orthodoxy – the one true faith. As Metropolitan Philip and then-Metropolitan Michael Shaheen had the strength and wisdom to reunite the Antiochian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada in 1975, we should continue their example. We must work towards unification of all Orthodox Christians in North America, and we will fulfill St. Paul’s words to the Ephesians in 4:12-13 by “...Building up the Body of Christ; until we all come to the unity of the faith.”

Liturgical notes . . .

- ❖ **Advent** Please remember that the Christmas Fast begins on Thursday, November 15th. Like other Lenten periods, the Church calls us to increase (or even start) our efforts in prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor. It is also the perfect time to have your confession heard. Confessions are heard on Sunday morning from 8:40 a.m. to 9:40 a.m. or by appointment. Please note, as in past years, confessions will *not* be heard on Christmas Eve. Let’s all do something to prepare us for our Lord’s birth! (Liturgy for Christmas will be on Monday, December 24th @ 6 pm; *no* services will be held on Tuesday, December 25th).
- ❖ **Please Remember** It is the teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church that only those Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves through prayer, recent confession, and fasting (and being on time for church) should approach the chalice. It is likewise the teaching of the Church that our non-Orthodox guests

and friends should not approach the chalice or that Orthodox Christians cannot and should not take communion in non-Orthodox Churches.

❖ **Cremation** The following policy statement concerning cremation is excerpted from the minutes a meeting of our Archdiocesan Synod of Bishops: "His Eminence (Metropolitan PHILIP) emphasized that the Orthodox Church is **against** cremation. The policy of this Archdiocese is that no funeral will be offered in any location for a body that will be cremated. However, the priest may say the Trisagion for the departed over the body in the funeral home before cremation and in the church for the forty-day memorial. Under no circumstances will any prayer be offered over the ashes. This was approved unanimously."

Church Records...

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

- Christopher Constantine-Barakat, son of Dr. Elias and Dr. Elena Nawfel of Waterville, ME, was baptized on August 11th.
- Lily Grace, daughter of Robert Zahka and Tracey White of Dedham, was baptized on August 19th.
- Ryan Anthony, son of Timothy Mayer and Dr. Julie Pilitsis of Shrewsbury, was baptized on September 9th.
- Brian David, son of Derek and Jennifer (George) Tawa of Hanover , was baptized on September 16th.

Many Years!

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

+Leo Abdelahad (86) of Walpole, MA fell asleep in the Lord on August 15th. His wife, son and 2 daughters, along with their families, survive him. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

+Jamila (Tahmoush) Robinson (52) of Tewksbury, MA fell asleep in the Lord on October 4th. A son, daughter and grandson survive her. Burial was at the National Cemetery in Bourne.

+Annie Hamwey (86) of Encino, CA fell asleep in the Lord on October 7th. Her 2 sons and their families survive her. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

Memory Eternal!

From the Executive Board... WOW!! What a Celebration!!

The members of the Executive Board would like to thank all parishioners, and our support staff, who helped and participated in our memorable Centennial Celebration. We would like to thank Metropolitan Philip for foregoing the very important Synod Meeting in Damascus, Syria in order to celebrate with us. God Grant him Many Years! We would like to thank our pastor Fr. John, and our prior pastors who gathered with us to help complete this celebration. God grant them many years!!

We have much to do in the upcoming years. Look for information in our newly launched monthly newsletter, [The Executive Board Report](http://www.stjohnd.org/orgs/execboard/reports/ebreport200709.pdf), which can be found at: <http://www.stjohnd.org/orgs/execboard/reports/ebreport200709.pdf>, our Sunday bulletin, and our email messages. We are looking forward to continuing to work together as a community. Respectfully submitted on behalf of Your Executive Board, *Wayne E. Zahka, Chairman*

From the VMS... The Ladies of the Virgin Mary Society are in the kitchen baking for the upcoming bazaar. Unfortunately, this year, were unable to cook any food due to other commitments. We are baking assorted pastries for the bazaar. Next year, God willing, we will be back to our regular routine. Our baking days are still the same: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Come and join us! You would be most welcomed! From all of the ladies, we wish you a blessed and happy holiday season. In Christ, *Lillian Khouri, President*

From the Church School... Our Church School was very proud to be part of the Centennial weekend festivities with a lively presentation on Saturday morning. Our tenth graders opened the program, eloquently expressing their feelings about being members of our great Church. This was followed by a group of very animated Apostles who sang their hearts out as they taught us about Christ's first followers. We gave the audience a quick history lesson on the background of St. John's and the importance of our rich legacy, as we built a puzzle depicting all the facets of our Church School – faith, family, fellowship and service. We finished with a beautiful rendition of "Psalm of Thanksgiving", a favorite hymn that The

Villagers sing every summer. Our Parent Guild served a delicious brunch, and the students had a wonderful opportunity to visit with Metropolitan Philip.

If you missed it, here is a copy of the essay which our tenth graders presented:

Why I Love St. John's Church
By Cameron, Alyssa, Russell and Elizabeth

I am proud to be a member of St. John of Damascus Church, and I feel very blessed to be part of this wonderful community. St. John's is a welcoming place for all of us to come together for worship, fellowship and stewardship. We all come from different towns and drive far distances to get here, and still we all feel like one big family. Whether I am attending Divine Liturgy or Church School, participating in our Family Nights, or attending Teen SOYO, I am at home here.

There are so many reasons that I love St. John's. One of the main reasons is our Church School. Our Church School is filled with lots of students, and our teachers are willing to teach all of us each and every week. I learn something new about God and being an Orthodox Christian all the time. I come to Church to pray and to learn about my faith, surrounded by family. Here at St. John's you don't have to actually be related to be called family, but it just feels like that.

I love St. John's because my entire family comes to Church, and we worship together. Also, our Teen SOYO program is a great way to get together with other teens. I enjoy participating in various SOYO activities, such as fund-raisers, service projects and social activities. It is a terrific experience to help others doing community service or working at a Church function, while having fun at the same time. We all live separate lives during the week, but when we get together as members of St. John's Church, it is a special feeling.

Community is what makes St. John's so special. There would be no SOYO, no choir, no VMS, if not for the strong sense of community that is associated with our parish. By partaking in these organizations, we are able to walk along the path to Heaven as a group, as a community, always there for each other. We must support each other, because it is difficult to carry out God's will at many times in our life, no matter how strong our heart is, we need each other and the Lord to guide us. Let us all remember 100 wonderful years in this parish and let us not forget that the treasure in life is what we have in church; "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

In the next few weeks, we will hang our completed puzzle in the Church School corridor. Stop by so that we can show it to you!

If you have not yet returned your Church School Registration Form, please do so as soon as possible. This year we are asking all Church School families to register, so that we can put together our own database, assign room parents, and

improve communication of Church School news and activities. As always, please feel free to contact me with your comments or questions at any time!

In Christ, *Nancy Close, Church School Director*

*From the Parent Guild...*At the time of this writing, we are all hopefully getting a bit of well-deserved rest after just having celebrated a joyous Centennial week end. The fall was busy for the Guild, starting with the barbecue held the first Sunday of church school, which was well attended. We ran the brunch with Metropolitan Philip on Saturday morning of the Centennial week end. The Guild presence was strong, with many members working in the kitchen to produce a brunch that was enjoyed by all in attendance. We had voted at an earlier meeting to present a gift of \$2,500 to Metropolitan Philip for the Antiochian Village capital fundraiser. Nancy Close presented the check to Metropolitan Philip at the brunch, and he expressed his appreciation. Now that the Centennial celebration is behind us, we hopefully will be resurrecting the Family Nights which started last year. Please watch for information on the Family Nights, and join us! Yours in Christ, *Carol Hazerjian and Bertina Kurker*

*A Message from the Night of Memories Committee...*The Night of Memories was a huge success. We were touched to see so many people enjoying the many archives, the photos, and the DVD presentation. Don't forget to purchase your Commemorative DVD collection so that you can enjoy the show over and over again. A special thank you to everyone who came to the Church to help us, on the many times we sent out an email seeking assistance. Sincerely, The Night of Memories Committee: *Wayne E. Zahka, Jim Sabbag, Tony Hamwey, Jimmy Chalhub, David Haddad, Chris Bezreh, Dana Zahka, Leila Zahka, Erica Zahka, and Melanie Zahka*

*From the Centennial Committee...*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, The Centennial committee promised the parish a centennial celebration worthy of this great parish, something they would talk about for many years to come. Thanks to all of your tremendous support, we have succeeded. Our Gala week-end was surely one to remember! To witness the turnout of people at the events, and to see the happy faces of everyone enjoying themselves, made all the hard work and time into it very well worthwhile. It is truly incredible what we can accomplish with team work, and when we take our talents and use them to the utmost of our ability. Please accept my sincere thanks to all of those who devoted their time and efforts

to this great event, and to the parishioners of St. John of Damascus, who made it all possible. *Yours in Christ, Tom Sabbag, Chairman*

Order Your Centennial Photos and DVDs

The Centennial Committee would like to thank all of our parishioners and friends for making our Centennial Gala Celebration a huge success. We truly hope that all of you had a wonderful and memorable experience.

Be sure to order your Night of Memories DVDs. All six DVDs will be available for a limited time only, so please don't wait. Just fill out the enclosed order form and mail it to the church office or order online at www.stjohnd.org/100th. DVDs are going fast and will only be available for purchase through November.

Thousands of professional photographs were taken by Dan Busler throughout the Centennial Gala. All photos may be viewed and ordered online by visiting the Centennial website at www.stjohnd.org/100th and clicking on the links to the various event photos. A complete collection of the photographs will also be available for viewing at the Centennial table after liturgy through November.

The Commemorative Ad books were distributed at the Centennial Ball on October 6th. If you placed an ad in the ad book and you **did not** receive an ad book at the Ball, you may request an ad book by contacting the Church Office by phone at 781-326-3046 or e-mail at churchoffice@stjohnd.org ... or by contacting John Haddad at adbook@stjohnd.org. When we receive your request, we will put your ad book aside for you to pick up either at the church office during the week or after Liturgy on Sunday. *Please note: Only one ad book will be issued per ad, so please do not ask for extra books. Only a limited amount of books were printed. Those who are entitled to an ad book MUST REQUEST a book ... they will not automatically be given out, so please spread the word to others. Ad book requests will be taken through Sunday, October 28th. All remaining ad books will be sold at the Bazaar for \$30 per book. We ask for your cooperation with this process.*

You can continue to donate to the Centennial Fund through the remainder of 2007 to help defray our costs and contribute to the financial success of our centennial year celebration. Of course you can donate online or by contacting the church office.

Please feel free to contact any of our committee members for your feedback on the weekend. The e-mails for the members can be found on our website at

From the Order of St. Ignatius... Welcome to the following new members of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch: Saba Barghout, sponsored by Louella Cardoos, Laurie Bradley and Debbie Greenstein, sponsored by Elizabeth MacNeil, Mark Haddad and Michael Mattar, sponsored by Cynthia Haddad, Linda Hakar, sponsored by Olivia Waishek, Margaret Khouri, sponsored by Lillian Khouri, Laurice Kurker, sponsored by Robert Kurker, Souehil Massabni, sponsored by Dr. Ghada Massabni, John Najjar, sponsored by Bertina Kurker, Dr. John Pilitsis, sponsored by Dr. James Bezreh, Dennis and Lillian Rawan, sponsored by George Khouri, Elaine Sabbag, sponsored by Cynthia Capobianco, Abe Sabbag, sponsored by Dan Capobianco, and Leo Saidnawey, sponsored by Joan Teebagy. Also, one member joined anonymously. In addition, Dr. Ghada Massabni upgraded her membership to Dame Commander, and Christine Bezreh to Life Member. These new members were inducted by Metropolitan Philip at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy celebrating the Centennial of St. John of Damascus Church on October 7, 2007. This brings St. John of Damascus to a total of 53 members of the Order, including two Life Members.

In September, The Order of St. Ignatius hosted a meeting of its Governing Council and a reception in Worcester, Massachusetts to showcase some of the programs supported by the Order. Representatives of Antiochian Village, Orthodox Christian Fellowship, the Department of Youth, Married Seminarians, Holy Trinity Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center, and others, who have benefited from grants provided by The Order, spoke about the impact these funds have made on their programs. In some cases, The Order provides a substantial part of their budgets. And remember, The Order spends 98% of the funds it raises on charitable causes, with only 2% going towards the administration of the organization.

It is never too late to join the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. One new member said, "I can't cook anymore, but I can support my church by joining The Order. I spent more than \$500 on cooking." Anyone may join The Order at any time with a contribution of \$41.67 per month deducted from your bank account. Here are some of the other things you can get for around \$40 per month: a daily cup of coffee, health club membership, weight loss membership, a carton of cigarettes, lottery tickets, etc. Your membership in The Order, when added to the 3,700 members nationwide, provides \$1.4 million a year to the Archdiocese to

distribute. Look for membership applications at church, or contact Fr. John or any member of The Order for more information.

*From the Stewardship Committee...Time, Talents and Treasures.....*As we reflect on our glorious Centennial celebration it is evident that our Stewardship program is alive and well, here at St. John's church. The three components of Stewardship that are, Time, Talents and Treasures were clearly present. From all of the TIME spent planning this event, the parishioners with their TALENTS who stepped forward to chair committees, and everyone that worked together with them, to help make this weekend such a wonderful success. Then there are the TREASURES, given by all of you that supported the events, by being a sponsor, or placing an ad in the ad book, and also by attending the events of the weekend and showing your support. Together we have joined as parishioners of St. John's to make our Centennial Celebration a blessed event we will all remember.

*From the Fellowship of St. John the Divine...*The Annual Senior Citizen Christmas Luncheon, for those 65 and older, will be held on Sunday, December 9th, immediately following Liturgy. Watch for your invitation in the mail. Please call Barbara Khouri at 617.323.4463 if your invitation hasn't arrived by mid November.

From the Bazaar Chairpersons: Gail Kurker & Kathleen Tava

St. John's just finished a great Centennial weekend and it was fantastic to see old and new friends and parishioners. Congratulations to the Centennial Committee for a job well done. Now we can all relax and breathe but only a little. St. John's annual bazaar will be November 2nd, 3rd and 4th and believe it or not, that is not far off! We sure could use help in many areas, so please consider volunteering.

- The Auction Chairpersons Sheila Hamwey and Paula Hamwey are in need of any gift certificates, new items, restaurant gift certificates, sports tickets, sports memorabilia, etc. Any new item would help our auction. Please contact Sheila or Paula with your donation.
- The "Almost New Boutique" is looking for items of clothing for donation. Please remember it must be clean and useable and on a hanger. The "Almost New Boutique" would like donations of jewelry.

- Don't forget the "Hidden Treasures" table. Donations may be brought down to the church starting October 14th. PLEASE, DO NOT BRING COMPUTERS, COMPUTER MONITORS, OR TV's.

Lastly, this year's painting for the auction by Alyce McLaughlin will be EXTRA SPECIAL. Here is a hint 100 years. The live auction will be on Saturday, November 3rd at 3:00pm Don't miss out!

Announcements...

❖ **FYI...** In 2008, the date of Orthodox Easter is April 27th; Great Lent begins on Monday, March 10th.

❖ **BULLETIN** The deadline for the November 25th bulletin will be Tuesday, November 20th at 10 am. The deadline for the bulletins for December 23rd and Christmas Eve will be Tuesday December 18th at 10 a.m. SHARP. These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead. The office will close at noon on Wednesday, November 21st and will reopen on Monday, November 26th. The deadline for the December 30th bulletin will be Wednesday, December 26th at 10 a.m. SHARP.

Church of St. John of Damascus
300 West Street
Dedham, MA 02026-5594

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THE TORCHBEARER

is the Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus

A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

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Sunday Services: Matins 9 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10 a.m.

Church Office Hours...*Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.*

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10 a.m.

Please plan accordingly.

DEADLINE for the January/February 2008 *Torchbearer* will be **November 16th**.

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



KONTAKION OF THE NATIVITY

Today the virgin giveth birth to the Transcendent in essence; the earth offereth the cave to the unapproachable One; the angels with the shepherds glorify him; and the Magi with the star travel on their way; for a new child hath been born for our sakes, God before the ages.

TROPARION OF THE NATIVITY

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath given rise to the light of knowledge in the world for they that worshipped the stars did learn therefrom to worship thee, O Sun of Justice, and to know that from the east of the Highest thou didst come O Lord, glory to thee.

"Who Are You?"

By Reverend Fr. Bohdan Hladio, Pastor, St. Vladimir Orthodox Church of
Hamilton, Ontario

I know your last name, I know your family, but I don't know you. The phone call I got about you was the one I dread. "Father, so and so has passed away, and the family wants to know when you can serve the funeral"

What am I supposed to do? I've been in this parish long enough to have seen and met anyone who has even the slightest connection with our community. I've never seen you in Church. I've never spoken with you. I've never noticed you at a wedding, a baptism, or a funeral. Where have you been?

Were you a believer? If you were a believer, you certainly didn't act like one. What I mean is that there has always been a clear set of expectations set before anyone who wishes to call themselves a Christian. Christians approach Holy Confession and Holy Communion at least once a year, for example. You didn't. Christians support the Church with their time, money, and talents. You didn't. Christians attend Divine Services regularly. You, to my knowledge, and to the knowledge of everyone I've talked to, haven't darkened the door of our church in years.

From what I've been told you were rather successful at what you did. You obviously spent lots of time learning career skills, spent lots of time working and making money. From your address, I see that you certainly were well off financially. But even this confuses me, because our parish keeps records of everyone who donates even the smallest amount of money, and I've never seen your name there. You had money for the government. You had money for food. You had money for shelter, for vacations, for a cottage, for concerts, and for restaurants. Yet now that you're dead it's the Church, the same Church you didn't support when you had the chance that gets asked to bury you.

"But he was baptized here", they tell me. Sometimes I think the sectarians are right, and we should wait until people reach the age of reason so that they might consciously accept baptism, with all its consequences and responsibilities. The fact that you were baptized here simply underlines the fact that someone failed- perhaps your family, perhaps our community, perhaps you yourself- in your

Christian upbringing and development. If you hadn't been baptized you (and your parents and godparents) would at least have an excuse for your conduct.

At times like this I just want to go on vacation, and let a substitute priest deal with things, because not knowing the situation at least he won't have qualms of conscience.

Did you believe in God, or did you mock God? Were you positively disposed to the Church and Her teachings, or did you actively support social and moral teachings? Not knowing these things, I don't know if it's proper to bury you.

A Christian burial is for Christians. Were you? The Church always gives the benefit of the doubt, but we've got to base that benefit on something. So far, I'm drawing a blank.

What do I say to your family? They are distressed and heartbroken. All of us realize that death is just around the corner, that a weak heart, a drunk driver, or any of a myriad of other causes can snuff out our life even as we feel ourselves to be young, healthy, and in control of our destiny. Your sudden death, not having time to say even a simple "good-bye, I love you" has devastated them. I hope there were no unresolved conflicts, because in a case like this it makes those left behind even more distraught, and sometimes those wounds never heal.

The one thing I can say for sure is that you do have a few devout relatives, people who truly love God and serve Him in any way they can; while most of your friends and family would be only mildly upset if I didn't bury you. (I actually think they'd be happier. A "rent-a-preacher" service would be shorter and more easily forgotten, and afterwards they'd have the satisfaction of complaining about how the priest was "unfair" or "judgmental" and feel justified in not having anything to do with the Church. Until they wanted a nice wedding, or to baptize their child, or died). It's these pious relatives who are foremost in my mind, as I consider what to do.

But as the saying goes, "God has children, but no grandchildren." It doesn't matter whether our parents or aunts or uncles are saintly, or priests, or bishops, or whatever, it's what we ourselves do with the time, talents and material wealth which God has given to us which will either open or lock the gates of Heaven for us. If we don't want to be saved even God Himself can't force us (and God can do anything!).

The bottom line, you see, is that I don't feel comfortable making either you, or me, or the Church into a hypocrite. Jesus preached love, but He also preached truth and responsibility. He accepted the worst sinners who repented, but he condemned everyone (the "church people" first and foremost!) who was hypocritical.

So you see, my problem is not that you were a sinner. I'm a sinner too. My problem is that if you consciously chose not to have anything to do with the Church during your lifetime then burying you from the Church makes you into a hypocrite, which I don't want to do. If I decide to bury you for a stipend, or just in order not to "make waves" in the community, I'm then a hypocrite. And if hypocritical priests bury hypocritical laymen it certainly makes the Church appear hypocritical, doesn't it?

"But the Church is full of hypocritical people", you might say. You're right, and again, I'm one of them. I personally would rather deal with an honest agnostic than a nominal believer. But the very fact that someone is willing to give God the "benefit of the doubt" (if not real faith) by paying their parish membership, by being well disposed towards the Church, by showing up for the occasional religious or cultural or social gathering really does mean something. We are taught that when we take one step towards God, He comes running toward us (you may have heard the story of the prodigal son. It's been on the bestseller list for a long time). At this moment I'd really like to learn about any conscious step you may have taken in your adult life towards God. I'm not having much luck.

So I don't know what to do. I don't know whether giving you a Christian burial will be for God's glory, or compromise the Church's authority and discipline. We all know that a funeral has absolutely nothing to do with whether we go to heaven or not. Many saints didn't receive a Christian burial, but are in heaven. Others, who were buried with great pomp and ceremony but had grave, unrepented sins weren't helped by their funerals, because repenting is one of the few things only we can do for ourselves. In any other sphere of life a different set of expectations is in place-if I'm not in the army, for example, and ask for a military funeral the officer at the local base will not only deny my request, he'll think that I'm crazy. But the Church, is, well, supposed to be different!

"But Father, the funeral is for the living". If I hear this nonsense one more time I think I'm going to be sick. I've never heard of a funeral being served for someone

who was alive. Orthodox Christians believe that prayers for the dead can be beneficial. We don't believe in "closed casket funerals, or worse yet, funerals without a corpse. Yes, a funeral, piously served and chanted, with a proper sermon, can bring great comfort to the grieving and spiritual edification (sometimes even enlightenment) to those present. But it's my experience that people "write their own eulogy." In cases like yours lying won't do, and telling the truth might not be terribly comfortable.

So forgive me. If I was wiser, and more compassionate, and holier, I'd know what to do, what to say. But I don't. Am I going to serve the funeral? I don't know yet. The only thing I know for sure is that at this moment I hope and pray with all my heart that your current dilemma is less traumatic than mine. But somehow I doubt it.