
THE TORCHBEARER

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

November/December 2009

St. John's representative for the 2009 Oratorical Festival this past June was Alyssa Hoffman of Dedham. Alyssa, a senior at Dedham High School, is the daughter of Pam Neil. If you read Alyssa's oratory, you will see why she was the Judges' choice this year. Many years to her and her family!

"Be Mindful, O Lord of those who bear fruit and do good works in thy holy Churches, and who remember the poor." To bear fruit can have various meanings. In this passage, from the Anaphora of Sts John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, to bear fruit refers to the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. The nine fruits are love, joy, peacefulness, kindness, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Each of these fruits should serve as a guide for us to follow in our daily lives; they are what make us all Orthodox Christians. As for doing good works in our churches, this is simply one way we can benefit from God's love, and in return help others in our church community. We can spread the love, joy, peace, and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially to those who are materially poor and spiritually poor. The fruit of love brings us all closer to our lord Jesus Christ. Christ was crucified for us because he loved us, and his example of absolute love is one we should all live by. "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Galatians 5:13-16) This passage tells us clearly what Christ wants from us; he wants us to use our freedom to make the right choice and follow the path of love for one another. The kind of love Christ wants from us is not just the love we feel for a family member or friend, but the love for those who are our enemies. As a teen in today's world, I know personally how difficult it can be to love everyone unconditionally, even my enemies. With the help of Christ and His love I can manage to love my enemies unconditionally. The fruit of joy is a wonderful emotion to experience, like the joy I get when I block a goal in field hockey to save my team from losing, or when I see the smile on the face of someone else. My favorite type of joy is the joy that gushes forth when our church pulls together to put on an event such as a benefit hufli. This past October, our Teen SOYO held a benefit hufli in honor of a young baby who died from a cardiac abnormality. The event was enormously successful, and we split our profits evenly between Children's Hospital Boston Cardiac Care Unit and the Al-Kafaat Foundation in

Lebanon. A benefit hufli not only brings joy to those who attend but to the family whose loves ones were lost because they see how well their church can pull together to support them. As a member of Teen SOYO, I participate in a lot of good works in the church such as benefit hufli, clothing drives, canned food drives, and more.

Peace is a common word used in the church because Christ was a Man who sought to bring peace to earth. Peace is a fruit of the spirit because everyone should live in peace as brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, peace can be difficult to maintain as a teen in today's society due to all of the conflicts and temptations surrounding us. When someone tries to argue with you, or something does not go as planned, it is not always easy to stay peaceful in such a stressful situation. Also, as a teen who participates in sports, it is even harder to remain peaceful when someone hits you, pushes you, or plays unfairly. My first and immediate thought is to strike back, which is not the Orthodox Christian answer to any situation. As an Orthodox Christian teen, I must rise above my sinful urges and follow the fruits of the spirit to become not only a better person, but a better Orthodox Christian.

"Treat others the way you want to be treated," a phrase I have heard throughout my entire life. Kindness, like all of the nine fruits, can be a complicated virtue to uphold. When I am in school, I often find it very difficult to be kind, although I generally consider myself a kind person. However, when someone says something to offend me or something I stand for, or even a friend, my immediate reaction can sometimes be to lash out at the offender and to respond with more unkindness. All I need to do in these instances is look to the Church for the right way to respond. Christ taught us all about kindness when he was about to be crucified and he said "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) This statement is really touching because no matter how badly his offenders hurt him, he still managed to be kind enough to forgive them. This makes me realize that if Christ can forgive his offenders who are about to end his life, then I can forgive my offenders and be kind in return.

There is one last fruit I want to talk about, and that is self-control. You can assert self control over a lot in your life, but the most important aspect of this quality, and the one that Christ teaches us, is harvesting self-control of your spiritual life. Self control, in your spiritual welfare, can be like a fork in the road. You can choose to follow Christ on the true path to salvation and everlasting life, or you can follow Satan down the path of sin, far away from Christ and His love. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Ephesians 6:10-12) With Christ we can do anything, like good works for the church and care for the poor. Not everyone has self control over their spiritual welfare, especially those poor in spirit. At times when life's trials and tribulations may seem especially difficult, self-control is a very complex quality to maintain. It is difficult to fight the urge to retaliate or turn our emotions outward. Placing all of my faith and love into God's hands and trusting in His love and wisdom is the only way for me to stand against the devil. When I place myself in the armor of God, I am surrounding myself with the ultimate protection and guidance. With that guidance, I am equipped to help those who are spiritually poor and lack the faith of

God they need. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'" (Matthew 25:41-46). We are all equal members of Christ's family, and when we do not treat each other as such, we are not treating Christ well. The poor need us to feed them, clothe them, visit them, give them drinks, and invite them in, just as we would with our friends and family. Although they are poor, the materially poor are no less than we are, and they should be treated as our equals in Christ, and as equals to Christ. So there are nine fruits of the Holy Spirit for us to bear, and choosing to bear them will bring us closer in our Orthodox faith, and closer to our God and Savior Jesus Christ. We should always do good works in the Church to help ourselves and others benefit from the fruits of the spirit, whether it be sponsoring a benefit huffli, holding a canned goods and clothing drive, or just raising money for a local charity. There is nothing we cannot do to become closer to Christ and His love, which is why I leave you with this simple but yet powerful passage from (Philippians 4:13), "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Liturgical notes . . .

- ❖ **Advent** Please remember that the Christmas Fast begins on Sunday, 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 Thursday, December 24th @ 6 pm; *no* services will be held on Friday, 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 and 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...

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

+Nora A. Barakat (84) of Hanover fell asleep in the Lord on August 21st. She is survived by five sons, along with their families. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

+Rose Affsa (92) of Weymouth fell asleep in the Lord on September 12th. She is survived by three daughters, one son, and their families. Burial was at Pine Hill Cemetery in Quincy.

Memory Eternal!

From the Executive Board... Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I hope and pray this letter finds you and your family in good health.

As I shared with you in my last communication, the Executive Board set our goals for the year. I would like to use this space to share our thoughts and ideas on each of these four goals.

Establish an adult education program

We are hearing from many parishioners that they would like to learn more about our faith, and attend interactive refresher classes. These would include topics like creation, death and dying, and the history of the Orthodox Church. We will be conducting a survey in the upcoming weeks to get your ideas on topics, speakers, and convenient times. Please watch for that and provide your input.

Restore the church as a cultural center

We are an Antiochian Orthodox Church, and we want to bring back some of our cultural heritage. We have a few ideas on how to approach that. First, look at providing Arabic language lessons for the adults and youth of the church. We are starting to investigate both a professional approach (e.g. Berlitz, Rosetta Stone) and a more casual approach relying on parishioners. Next, we would like to offer Arabic cooking classes for those interested in learning how to make kibbe, grape leaves, tabouleh, sfeeha, etc. Finally, we have a rich heritage in dance, and offering a way for those interested in learning Arabic dancing and belly dancing is another thought.

Increase parishioner participation in the life of the parish

This is picking up on the great work of the Stewardship Committee and working hand and hand with them to get more people involved. Many people have offered their time and talent to our parish, and there is plenty of work to do. We want to explore more how to match up these two needs. This will also be done by understanding the needs of each of our age-groups in the church: pre-teens, teens, 20s/30s, adults and seniors.

Increase community outreach

There are two parts to this goal. One, reach out to the community and invite them into our church, help them understand the Orthodox Church, and encourage them to participate. Two, reach out to the community by giving back and helping where needed (e.g. feeding the homeless, volunteer in the community). This is an important part of our faith, and we want to do more of it.

We have a committee in place under the leadership of Mike O'Hara focused on the planning and execution of these goals. Once again, I encourage you to reach out and let us know your thoughts -- what makes sense and what else do we need to think about. To be successful, we need to work on these goals together. Feel free to send me email at executiveboard@stjohnd.org anytime. *With the love of Christ, Don Khouri II*

From the Order of St. Ignatius... The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch is the charitable arm of the Archdiocese, spending over \$1.5 million dollars a year around the United States and the world.

The order also funds programs locally. The Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Nursing and Rehabilitation Center provides high quality care to long term and rehabilitation residents. The Order is a Leaders' Circle member and has two Room Dedication plaques in the facility. Holy Trinity is a testament to the commitment of a Christian community that strives to serve others, and the Order is proud to support these endeavors.

The Order's latest grant was awarded to the American Arab Benevolent Association to kick off its fundraising effort to build Cheriton Heights, AABA's newest project to provide more affordable senior housing in the Boston area. The proposed 70-unit facility will be for seniors (62 and over) and will include a mixture of low income, moderate income, and market rate apartments.

These grants are made possible by an increasing number of memberships. You can join the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch with an annual contribution \$500 or \$1000. You may use Electronic Fund Transfer to deduct either \$41.67 or \$83.34 monthly from your checking account. There is also Life Membership, which is a commitment of \$15,000 payable over three years. Only 2% of the funds raised are used for administrative purposes, with 98% of the funds used to sponsor the many good works of

The Order. Please contact me if you have any questions about The Order. *Christine Bezreh*

From the Stewardship Committee... Dear Stewards of St. John's, I would like to thank all of you for your open minds and generous support over the past 3 years when we embarked on our stewardship program. We have made great strides as a parish with the power of feel good giving. We must continue to search our hearts each year and submit a pledge form that will reflect how much we are able to provide to our parish and church through our time, treasury's and talent.

As the stewardship program continues to develop and prosper the committee and I feel it is time for us to embark on our next journey together. As stewards we should all be reaching out to our family and friends that either no longer come to church or just attend during holidays. We need to let them know that they are loved and missed throughout the rest of the year.

As mentioned on Stewardship Sunday we would like to host a Prodigal Son-day on October 25th. We warmly invite all past, present and new parishioners to celebrate being part of the St. John's family on this day. After worshipping together, there will be a special coffee hour and time for fellowship. Please help us to make Prodigal Son-day a wonderful day. We hope to see you! *Debbie Greenstein and the Stewardship Committee*

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 13th, 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.

Announcements...

❖ **FYI...** In 2010, the date of Orthodox Easter is April 4th; Great Lent begins on Monday, February 15th.

❖ **BULLETIN** The deadline for the November 29th bulletin will be Tuesday, November 24th at 10 am. The deadline for the bulletins for Christmas Eve and December 27th will be Tuesday, December 22nd at 10 a.m. SHARP. These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead. The office will close at noon on Wednesday, November 25th and will reopen on Monday, November 30th. The deadline for the January 3rd bulletin will be Wednesday, December 30th at 10 a.m. SHARP.

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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 2010 *Torchbearer* will be **November 9th**.

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