
THE TORCHBEARER

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

January/February 2010

Below, please find a very interesting article, by Samuel G. Freedman, that was in the October 3rd edition of *The New York Times* about your archdiocese's efforts in spreading the Orthodox faith throughout the United States and Canada.

Cal Oren was threading his way through the Santa Cruz Mountains of California early one evening in 1993, driving his wife, brother and three tired children back from a day of hiking amid the redwoods. As their car neared the town of Ben Lomond, Mr. Oren said his brother pointed to a church on the roadside and said: "I've been inside this. It's really neat." So Mr. Oren pulled to a stop, and as the children stayed in the car, the grown-ups gingerly padded into the sanctuary of Saints Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church. A lifelong Presbyterian, Mr. Oren knew virtually nothing about the Antiochians or, for that matter, Orthodox Christianity in general. He had always associated Ben Lomond with hippies, geodesic domes and marijuana fields.

As he entered, a vespers service was under way. Maybe two dozen worshipers stood, chanting psalms and hymns. Incense filled the dark air. Icons of apostles and saints hung on the walls. The ancientness and austerity stood at a time-warp remove from the evangelical circles in which Mr. Oren traveled, so modern, extroverted and assertively relevant. "This was a Christianity I had never encountered before," said Mr. Oren, 55, a marketing consultant in commercial construction. "I was frozen in my tracks. I felt like I was in the actual presence of God, almost as if I was in heaven. And I'm not the kind of person who gets all woo-hoo."

The ineffable disclosure of that evening, a 15-minute glimpse into Byzantium, rattled everything certain in Mr. Oren's spiritual life. Even as he and his family kept attending a Presbyterian church near their home in suburban Baltimore, he stepped down as a ruling elder and Bible-study instructor. In 1995, he attended his first service at Holy Cross, an Antiochian church here, about 10 miles south of Baltimore. By late 1996, he was a regular, and in May 1997, he and his family converted and

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

Yet in its broader outlines, his movement from the Protestant realm into the Orthodox one, specifically into the Antiochian branch, attests to a significant and fascinating example of denominational migration. Over the last 20 years, the Antiochian Orthodox Church — with its roots in Syria and Lebanon and its longtime membership in the United States made up almost entirely of Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants — has become the destination of choice for thousands of Protestants of Northern European ancestry. The visible shift began in 1987 with the conversion of nearly 2,000 evangelical Christians, led by Peter E. Gillquist and other alumni of the Dallas Theological Seminary and the Campus Crusade for Christ. More recently, a wave of converts has arrived from such mainline Protestant denominations as the Episcopalian and Lutheran.

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

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

Whether or not the prediction pans out, it is certainly true that no American convert comes to the Antiochian church by convenience or ease. The denomination has only about 250,000 members in 250 congregations in the country, Professor Nassif estimated. Worshipers stand during most of the two-hour Divine Liturgy each Sunday. Nearly half the days in the year require fasting from meat, dairy, eggs and most fish. Yet when Mr. Oren and his family joined Holy Cross, they found kindred spirits in more ways than one. The church's pastor, Father Gregory Mathewes-Green, had left the Episcopal ministry to convert. His wife, Frederica Mathewes-Green, had written perhaps the definitive book on the subject, "Facing East: A Pilgrim's Journey Into the Mysteries of Orthodoxy" (HarperOne, 2006).

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

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

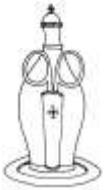
In the years since, though, Holy Cross has grown to 120 members, nearly two-thirds of them converts, and has bought and paid off a \$265,000 building. Fittingly for a congregation of spiritual seekers, Holy Cross occupies a stone structure built by Methodists and most recently occupied by the Pentecostals of the Korean Full Gospel New Generation Church. While the sun streams through a stained-glass window of Jesus that was installed by the original congregation, most of the icons were painted within the last dozen years by an

Orthodox convert, Carolyn Shuey. The other day, Father Mathewes-Green was tutoring the latest prospective convert, a Roman Catholic immigrant from Congo.

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

Church Records...

“As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ”



- Alexander Camille, son of Alexander and Donna Sahely, of Framingham, was baptized on November 1st.
- Alyssa Marie, daughter of Alexander and Donna Sahely, of Framingham, was baptized on November 1st.



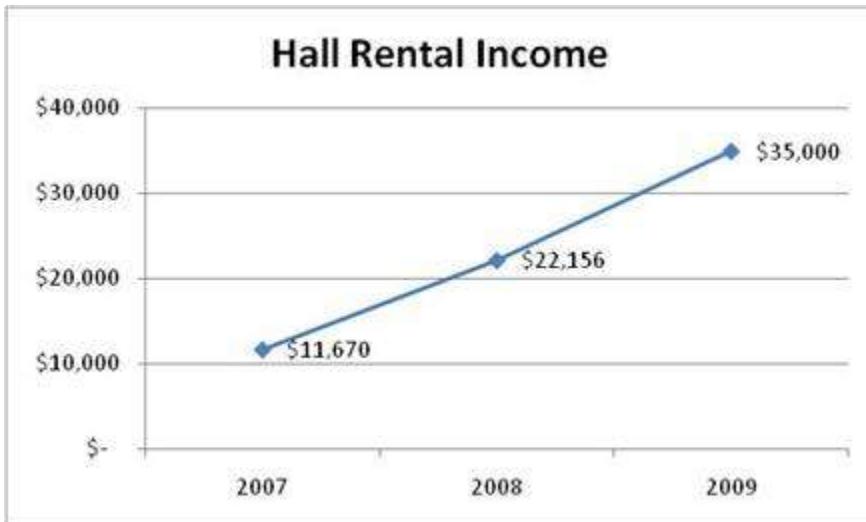
From the Executive Board... Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I hope and pray this letter finds you and your family doing well.

As I write this letter, we are wrapping up another successful Bazaar. I would like to extend my congratulations to Nancy Close, Carol Hazerjian, and the entire Bazaar committee for their tireless efforts and commitment to our church. I felt a great deal of energy and excitement in the air throughout the weekend.

The topic of this letter is Hall Rental. Under the leadership of Rick Ahto who serves as Vice-Chairman of the Board and Chairman of the Hall Rental Committee, this year has been a very

successful year. Rick has increased the marketing of the hall, as well as creativity to work out different situations. This has resulted in an increase of hall rental income.

To provide some context, the hall rental income in 2007 was \$11,670 and in 2008 it was \$22,156. This year, 2009, we are projecting a full-year income of over \$35,000. This number includes many things that I would like to point out. It includes a good combination of parishioner and non-parishioner rentals. Starting in September, The Newbridge Group is renting 40 parking spaces from us Monday through Friday for \$2000 / month. They are a planned, 162-acre multigenerational campus along the Charles River in Dedham that offers housing and health care for seniors of all ages and abilities. This is a great new addition to our regular income stream. We are also renting space behind the church to our snowplowing company for some of his equipment for \$625 / month. Thank you to Richie Homsy for coordinating this. Lastly, we are looking at a few other opportunities for 2010 that could have some long-term benefit as well, and if so, I will provide some additional information.



I would love to hear from you, I would love for you to get involved in the life of the parish, and I would love for you to participate in the execution of the goals we outlined in the last newsletter. Feel free to send me email anytime at executiveboard@stjohnd.org. With the love of Christ,

Don Khouri II, Chairman, St. John of Damascus Executive Board

St. John of Damascus Meritorious Award: The Executive Board is requesting nominations for the St. John of Damascus Meritorious Award. We will be presenting the award at the Organization Appreciation Day on February 28, 2010 to a member of the parish who has

dedicated a lifetime of service to our church. Last year's recipients were John Haddad and Laurice Kurker. Please send all nominations to executiveboard@stjohnd.org or call the church office **before January 31, 2010**.

From the Bazaar Co-chairs... Thank you to all who helped make the bazaar a success. We enjoyed working with all of you. Special thanks go to the ladies of the Virgin Mary Society for their devotion and hard work during months of cooking. Yours in Christ, Nancy and Carol

*From the Fellowship of St. John the Divine...*The Fellowship of St. John the Divine will be holding their annual Super Bowl Sunday Bake Sale on January 31st following Liturgy. Proceeds will benefit the Children's Relief Fund and the sponsorship of Rony Yammine of Beirut, Lebanon. Anyone who is willing to bake, please call Margaret Khouri @ 781. 329. 2201.

Stewardship and Thanksgiving

A good friend of mine has been known to use the phrase, "He (she) forgot to take his (her) grateful medicine!" Thanksgiving is an obvious time to remember to be grateful for everything God has given us, but it can be so challenging to have grateful hearts the rest of the year as well. Christian Stewardship in a spiritual sense is all about keeping life's priorities in order. It is taking that grateful medicine every day by striving to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) As we approach the Thanksgiving and Christmas season, let's all try to keep that spirit! Below is an excerpt from a Stewardship article that can also help us remember to give back to God all year long.

"What we are giving God is *His* already – our time, our talents, and our treasures. Consider:

Time: 168 hours per week. How much time do we spend in His House the Church? In His Presence in "small Church", our house on prayer? Do we respect and honor Him with His Time, and give it back to Him?

Treasures: Our financial resources and possessions are given to us by Him. Do we show our thankfulness by giving back to Him *first* from our hearts?

Talents: How am I making use of the talents He has blessed me with? Do I use them for my own purposes, or for His? Do I let them go to waste? Does our Church pay outsiders to do the work that we ourselves can do?

Christian stewardship is proportional-giving, whether it be a 'tithe' (10%) or a percentage thereof. It is *not* minimal-giving! "How much do I *have* to give?" is not Christian." (*Protopresbyter Stevo Rocnaje, McKeesport, PA*)

Our committee is so thankful that St. John's has embraced Stewardship! Let's continue to work together and encourage one another to focus on each of the aspects above. Wishing you all a blessed Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas, *Elizabeth MacNeil and the Stewardship Committee*

From the Stewardship Committee...

As Stewards of God we have so much to be thankful for. We are asked to search our hearts each year and give back in gratitude and Thanksgiving for all that God has bestowed upon us. Below is a guideline to help you decide what you are able to provide this year.

Annual Income	1%	2%	5%	10%
\$10,000	\$ 100	\$ 200	\$ 500	\$ 1000
\$20,000	\$ 200	\$ 400	\$ 1000	\$ 2000
\$30,000	\$ 300	\$ 600	\$ 1500	\$ 3000
\$45,000	\$ 450	\$ 900	\$ 2250	\$ 4500
\$60,000	\$ 600	\$ 1200	\$ 3000	\$ 6000
\$75,000	\$ 750	\$ 1500	\$ 3750	\$ 7500
\$90,000	\$ 900	\$ 1800	\$ 4500	\$ 9000
\$105,000	\$ 1050	\$ 2100	\$ 5250	\$ 10,500
\$120,000	\$ 1200	\$ 2400	\$ 6000	\$ 12,000
\$135,000	\$ 1350	\$ 2700	\$ 6750	\$ 13,500
\$150,000	\$ 1500	\$ 3000	\$ 7500	\$ 15,000
\$165,000	\$ 1650	\$ 3300	\$ 8250	\$ 16,500
\$180,000	\$ 1800	\$ 3600	\$ 9000	\$ 18,000
\$200,000	\$ 2000	\$ 4000	\$ 10,000	\$ 20,000

When Enough of God's People Return Enough of His Money to Do His Work - Good Things Happen!

Liturgical notes...

❖ To celebrate the Feast of our Lord's Theophany, the blessing of water will take place at the Divine Liturgy on Tuesday, January 5th at 5:30 pm. For those unable to attend, the blessed water will be available after church on January 10th.

❖ Great Lent starts on Monday, February 15th and Holy Pascha (Easter) is on Sunday, April 4th. More information will follow in the next issue of *The Torchbearer*. The deadline for this issue is Friday, January 29th.

Mary's Dream

I had a dream Joseph. I don't understand it, not really, but I think it was about a birthday celebration for our Son. I think that was what it was all about. The people had been preparing for it for about six weeks. They had decorated the house and bought elaborate gifts. It was peculiar, though because the presents weren't for our Son. They wrapped them in beautiful paper and tied them with lovely bows and stacked them under a tree. Yes, a tree Joseph, right in their house. They'd decorated the tree also. The branches were full of glowing balls and sparkling ornaments. There was a figure on top of the tree. It looked like an Angel might look. Oh it was beautiful. Everyone was laughing and happy. They were all excited about the gifts. They gave the gifts to each other, Joseph, not to our Son. I don't think they even knew Him. They never mentioned



His name. Doesn't it seem odd for people to go to all that trouble to celebrate someone's birthday if they don't know Him. I had the strangest feeling that if our Son had gone to this celebration, He would have been intruding. Everything was so beautiful, Joseph, and everyone so full of cheer, but it made me want to cry. How sad for Jesus not to be wanted at His own birthday celebration. I'm glad it was only a dream. How terrible, Joseph, if it had been real!

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

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A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

V. Rev. John K. Teebagy, Pastor

300 West Street ♦ Dedham, Massachusetts 02026-5594

♦ Telephone: 781. 326.3046 ♦ Fax: 781.326.4473

♦ Web Page: www.stjohnd.org

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 Lenten issue **Torchbearer** will be January 29th, 2010.

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