



St. John Chrysostom Church

A Mission of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
www.stjohnchrysostomchurch.org

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September SJCC News

My Joy in the Lord,

I am very happy to be back home with all of you. I had an interesting trip – though I was not able to see Patriarch Alexey due to his illness. I have returned with all the items that we wanted, including the gift for the Diocese of Hauran. I was able to see some wonderful churches – as well as some that were not so wonderful. Even in Russia – with millions of faithful – the Church does not have an easy time of it. Many of the old churches are in locations where people no longer live – the surrounding area is offices or stores – but, as the Patriarch once said, “If they give the churches back, how can we not take them?” At the same time, there are few churches in the surrounding areas where the people actually live. Some people face a commute of an hour or more to get to a church.

I brought a number of “things” back but I also brought back an appreciation for the dedication that you have to our church and the Faith. It was inspiring to see people who wanted every church to be a living community once again. It made me very sorrowful to contemplate that among 10 million ostensible Christians, (out of 12 million inhabitants of the metropolitan area) not even 20,000 could be found in the churches on a Saturday evening and only about 50,000 on a Sunday morning in the more than 1000 churches of the region and the number of communicants in a normal church would equal what we have in our mission.

May you continue in faith and love all the days of your lives.

With love, in Christ,
Fr. Seraphim

Bible Study & Saturday Discussions

We will resume both Wednesday Bible Study and Saturday Discussions following Vespers after the Holy Day of the Elevation of the Cross (Sept 14). Bible study begins Wednesday Sept. 17 at 7:00 pm and the Discussions on Saturday Sept. 20.

Bishop Basil's Visit

Our Bishop Basil will be visiting all the Antiochian parishes in Colorado during the week of Sept 28. He will begin his visit at the joint Picnic on Saturday, Sept. 27 and will continue during the rest of the week. A full schedule will be sent out when it becomes known. He will visit us on Wednesday, October 1. We will have Daily Vespers on that day – at 6:30 pm, followed by potluck dinner and discussion. (Remember that Wednesday is a fasting day.....)

From Miriam Bourquin:

Antiochian Parishes Community (APC) of Colorado

On Saturday, September 27, 2008, the First Annual Antiochian Parishes Community (APC) Picnic will be held at Clement Park in Littleton, Colorado. The picnic is scheduled from 11:30 am to 7:00 pm, with vespers being held with His Grace Bishop Basil at 5:00 pm. All of us are encouraged to attend this gathering as the purpose is to bring all people from the Colorado Antiochian Orthodox Christian Parishes together. This event is very very important, giving us the opportunity to get to know our brothers and sisters from the nearby Orthodox communities, in addition to those we already know. We don't always have the opportunity to attend Parish Life Conferences or other out of state events, but we always can visit our fellow Orthodox Christians right here in Colorado. Sometimes we find ourselves so comfortable with the people we know in our individual parishes, that we forget about the other churches in our community. We need to begin recognizing the larger extent of our Orthodox Community right here in Colorado as we are all one family and are not alone as Orthodox Christians. The idea of the APC Picnic is exactly this: to bring us out of our comfort zone and get to know others while enjoying a nice picnic at the park with lots of food and activities.

This picnic is to be treated as a potluck event, where each parish brings dishes of their individual ethnic foods to share with everyone else. Games will be set up for kids of all ages to keep them entertained throughout the day, and we are also encouraged to bring other games to entertain the adults. There is word that the Arabs will be bringing many Hookahs to share their culture with everyone else. The main idea is to get to know each other through conversation, games, and any other activities. Bring blankets, chairs, and anything else you would bring to a picnic. If you think you could volunteer with something, such as helping with the kids/adult games, food organization, or first aid let Miriam Bourquin know soon. Any help would be greatly appreciated. Either way, I hope all of you are excited to attend and participate in the first ever gathering of Colorado Orthodox Christians. It will be a memorable event to look forward to every year!

Diocesan Pilgrimage

The 2008 Pilgrimage will be to Kearney, Nebraska. I can already hear your "WHAT??? WHERE???" Yes it is to Kearney Nebraska for the 90th anniversary of the repose of Fr. Nicola Yanney, the first Orthodox priest in the Plains, and the first person ordained by St. Raphael. Here is his biography:

The Reverend Nicola Yanney, a native of Fi'eh, Lebanon, emigrated to the United States, arriving in Nebraska on December 1st, 1892. During his lifetime, Fr. Nicola was a man of several notable firsts. On April 3rd, 1904, Fr. Nicola became the first priest to be ordained by Bishop RAPHAEL of Brooklyn after the saint's consecration to the holy episcopacy. Taking up the cross of his priesthood and returning to his parish of St. George in Kearney, Nebraska, Fr. Nicola became the first resident Arab Orthodox priest in what is now the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.

During his pastorate, Fr. Nicola continued the work of his father in Christ, St. Raphael, by traveling extensively throughout the region and ministering to the scattered Orthodox faithful. Fr. Nicola spent four months of each year traveling to many places, holding services, performing baptisms, weddings and funerals, teaching the faithful and gathering Christ's flock into parish communities. The boundaries of Fr. Nicola's "parish" stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River and from the Canadian border to the Mexican border. While serving the faithful in Kearney, Father Nicola also founded a number of parishes throughout the region.

While selflessly ministering to his flock during the epidemic of 1918, Fr. Nicola fell victim to the Spanish influenza. Visiting the sick and suffering up until his very last day, he died on October 29th, 1918.

Sister Diocese Project

The Diocese of Mid-America has undertaken a “Sister Diocese” project with the diocese of Hauran – one of the earliest diocese of the Christian Church. The diocese is currently completely impoverished as it has been war-torn for the last 60 years and under partial occupation for the last 40. The diocese comprises the south-western area of Syria, including the Golan Heights which it has not been permitted to minister in since 1967. Under Bishop Basil's initiative, our diocese has committed to helping fund priests, support church reconstruction projects, and help in any way that we can. Going back to New Testament times, the church in and around Jerusalem was considered special and that our support for their sufferings and needs must be of the highest priority. More information on how you can help is available at the church in both hard and soft (on CD) copies.

Following the parish discussion, I contacted Metropolitan Sabba of the Diocese of Hauran through Subdeacon James Kallail, who is the contact for the Sister Diocese project. The Metropolitan was very appreciative and welcoming of the idea of getting a chalice set for one of his monastery chapels. We also can sponsor a child all the way through High School. However, the Diocese only has kindergarten classes – the rest are done via the normal schools in the area. Support in that case would be \$50/ month, rather than the \$25 that it costs the church for the kindergarten class. Also note, that the money is not going to individual children – though recipients will be acknowledged and identified – but the money is going to the Church to support its work of providing a Christian beginning to the children's studies.

As I mentioned in my message, I brought our gift for the diocese back and we will be mailing it to Subdeacon James Kailil, who will be responsible for its deliver to Metropolitan Sabba.

Icons needed:

In order to facilitate a pleasing visual experience, I would like to have all of the icons from either the same source or two or three compatible sources. Please do not take upon yourselves to order one of these icons from your favorite bookstore or icon seller. We have a sign-up list in church and will order them at the same time. Each icon is roughly 8" x 10" and costs approximately \$40. We have donations for the icons for the 12 Great Feasts and Pascha and a few others, See the sign-up sheet in church for availability and existing donations.

ON Confession (Part 4)

The Priest as Confessor

The temptation for the priest is to become a judge. Our Lord says, “As I hear I judge and my judgement is just because I seek not my own will but the will of the Father, who sent Me.” Not one of us can say the same. To us, and His disciples, Our Lord said “Condemn not”.⁷ However, we must judge, make distinctions – but we must do it in humility and repentance – as a fellow sinner, rather than as a superior. Which one of us wants to stand before our Lord and hear “Because of you in confession, this lamb of Mine was lost!” ? The tradition that has been handed down to me is: however badly phrased, a sin confessed is a sin confessed. We must pray for God's forgiveness for it. We CANNOT refuse to accept the confession. It is not for us to judge the sincerity of a confession. We can instruct, we can encourage, we can teach, but we cannot deny God's forgiveness, no matter how doubtful we are of the individual's heartfeltness. If a person stands before us and lies – he or she is not lying to us, they are trying to lie to God and will feel the weight of His Judgment. And if God decides to forgive - who are we to stand in the way? The Orthodox prayer of Reconciliation has no “I” in it.⁸

We are witnesses to the Confession. Even if we think the person should be confessing something else, unless we KNOW that they have sinned publicly and are omitting it from their confession, we cannot ask them to confess something that they do not bring up. In the same way, the only time that we can reject a confession is when it is no confession - “I have sinned in all things.” “I have done nothing wrong.” - neither of these is a confession because both are lies. That is the only circumstance in which we, as priests, have a responsibility to interject – when we know a person is lying. It is not enough to believe the person is lying, we must KNOW that what they are saying is a lie. That means, it cannot depend on what we have heard from others, no matter how truthful or dependable they are – if we have not personal knowledge, we cannot act on it. That does not mean that we cannot or should not inquire, if we believe that someone is lying, but we cannot, on the basis of our belief, reject a confession. It is preferable to err, if err we must, on the side of allowing someone to come to Communion or any of the other Sacraments improperly than to err by denying the Sacraments to one who is in need of them. The grace of God is sufficient for all things.

I have never heard of anyone being embittered by a priest who was too compassionate. (There is nothing good to be said of priests who are simply compliant to their parishioners' wishes rather than being a pastor to them, but that is quite different from being too compassionate to one's parishioners.)

Too often we forget that in the 12th Prayer before Communion, we call ourselves the Chief (or First) of all sinners. Are we lying? Or are we being hypocritical? If neither, then how can we complain of the sins of others when we have so many that we have not repented of? We demand spiritual depths from others that we drown in, ourselves. I have heard of people being asked, “Are you going to repeat this sin?” And some, naively, honestly, say “Yes.” They know their failures, they know their weakness and they confess those failures and weaknesses and say “Yes.” I have found few priests who will ask, “Do you want to continue sinning?” Most only ask if the person will. How can anyone, standing before God, not say, in all honesty, “Yes, I will continue sinning”. If St. Paul could say, “For not the good that I want, I do, but what I don't want, the evil, is what I do” how can we expect more from those who are in our care?

⁷ Most English versions translate it as “Judge” but the the authentic meaning is “Condemn, or issue a judgement of condemnation”

⁸ The older, and authentically Orthodox, prayer is: “It was God who pardoned David through Nathan the Prophet, when he confessed his sins, and Peter weeping bitterly for his denial and the harlot in tears at His feet, and the publican, and the prodigal; may that same God forgive you all things, through me, a sinner, both in this world and in that to come, and set you, uncondemned, before His dread Judgment Seat.”

Father Confessor, Spiritual Director/Father, Parish Priest

Father Confessors are made, Spiritual Directors are inspired, Parish Priests are assigned. All three functions can reside in one person, though it is rare.

The definitions of the three roles are:

- The person to whom you go to participate in the various Sacraments is your Parish Priest.
- The person to whom you regularly go to confession, who helps you with spiritual problems, and who helps you come closer to God is your Father Confessor.
- The person whose advice you seek – not just for spiritual matters but for all of life's issues – and who brings you closer to God - by example as well as by advice - is your Spiritual Director

The right and privilege and responsibility to hear Confessions and to offer the prayers of Reconciliation are the responsibility of every priest given such authority by the bishop.⁹ Except in Greece and the Middle East, almost every priest has been granted this authority by his bishop. The theory is that if a priest is going to administer the other Sacraments, then he has to be able to confirm that the people participating in them have no spiritual obstacles. Thus, he not only needs to be able to hear Confessions but it is the responsibility of his parishioners to come to Confession to him.

If the individual has a regular Father Confessor, then he can come to the Parish Priest once a year. If not, then he needs to come on a regular schedule.

Father Confessors are rare. I say that they are made because it takes humility and spiritual insight into people to be a Father Confessor – both of which come with spiritual maturation. Any priest can develop into a Father Confessor by listening to the people who come to him in Confession and by always remembering that his sins are greater than the sins of the person he's listening to. Much of a Father Confessor comes from recommending to others the things that work for him and seeing in which circumstances they work and in which they don't – and learning from that. It also comes from finding in others things that work and adding them to his “repertoire”. A Father Confessor for one person may be just another Parish Priest for another. Much of finding a Father Confessor comes from finding a Spiritual match. A Father Confessor is someone who is farther along the path that you are treading, and has gone through and experienced much of what you are going through and experiencing now.

The sad fact is that few priests become Father Confessors. Many become good Confessors, good Parish Priests but are not really Fathers for us in the Faith and in the Church. A good Father Confessor is one who does not condemn, who doesn't push you away, yet also does not allow you to get away with anything. A good Father Confessor can tell when you are hiding something – and when you need help to get it out and when you need time and prayer instead.

A Spiritual Director, on the other hand, is an individual – often not even a priest – who has been given a gift from God to know the hearts of others and to help them, in a very direct and personal way, to come closer to God. He, or she, is inspired by God to know even the secret things in our hearts. Historically, many Spiritual Directors did not end the Confessions they heard with the Prayer for Reconciliation,

⁹ A priest must be authorized by the bishop to perform ANY Sacrament (except Baptism – Baptism is the right of every baptized Christian to perform, though it should not be done carelessly). Usually such authorization is given at the time of ordination, though the right to hear Confessions is sometimes bestowed later, after a certain amount of spiritual development. In the Byzantine tradition, every priest that has the authority to hear confessions can be distinguished by the epigonation that he wears – the diamond shaped “dangle” at his knee (epigonation means “on the knee”). In the Slavic tradition it is not as easy to visually distinguish who can and who cannot hear confessions – but in the Slavic tradition it is extremely rare (even non-existent for all practical purposes) for a priest to not have that responsibility/privilege. (Priests can lose that responsibility but only as a result of an ecclesiastical punishment which is usually temporary, though they are rarely assigned to a parish in the interim.)

they did not go through the Rite of Confession, they simply heard a person's Confession, sometimes as nothing more than a brief conversation, and sent the individual to a priest for the Rite of Confession and the Prayers of Reconciliation.

I saw a real Spiritual Director once in the Donskoy Monastery in Moscow. A Great Schema-monk came to the vigil for a saint. At the end of the vigil, as he was leaving, people came up asking, “My husband beats me, what should I do?”; “I lost my job, what should I do now, where can I find a good/better job?” “I want to get married but I'm not sure she's the right one?”, and on and on. He answered them, some patiently, some not, at some he yelled, “Think”, some he called stupid – for asking questions to which they should know the answers. He was not there as the “Answer Man”, he was there as a guide, a support, a helper, not as a guru or a cult leader who made decisions for others. A Spiritual Director exists to guide you on the path to God, not to run your life and make all your decisions for you.

In monasteries, Spiritual Directors for the monks were assigned by the hegumen. For lay people, Spiritual Directors are chosen by the lay people, themselves. St. Seraphim of Sarov did not hang a sign on his door, “Spiritual Direction available inside, please knock.” Nor did he send out his disciples to the world saying, “The Elder Seraphim is available, come, bring all your problems and questions to him.” People heard of him from others and came to him and formed lines and finally, forced him to help them by their insistence. He neither sought it nor wanted it. Beware the person who claims for himself the name of Spiritual Director, that person – whether a monk or a priest or a bishop or a layman – is a charlatan.¹⁰

¹⁰ Patriarch Alexei II of Russia has coined the term “mladostartsy”. A “starets” is the term used for Spiritual Director, it literally means “elder”. “Mlado” means young or a neophyte. It is best understood by a reversal – an elder neophyte (not an “older” neophyte). It refers to so many, often young, monastics who present themselves to the world as spiritual elders – though they have barely begun their own spiritual journey and do more harm than good by their pretensions.

Schedule of Services and Events

September

- 13 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers
- 14 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy **The Elevation of the Cross**
- 17 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 9
- 20 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers & Discussion
- 21 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy
- 24 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 10
- 27 Sat 11:00 am Antiochian Parishes Community Picnic - Vespers at the Picnic
- 28 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy

October

- 1 Wed 6:30 pm Daily Vespers with Bishop Basil, Potluck, Discussion
- 4 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers & Discussion
- 5 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy
- 8 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 11
- 11 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers & Discussion
- 12 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy
- 15 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 12
- 18 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers & Discussion
- 19 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy
- 22 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 13
- 25 Sat 5:00 pm Vespers & Discussion
- 26 Sun 9:00 am Liturgy
- 29 Wed 7:00 pm Bible Study Luke 14

2008/2009 Tentative Schedule for the 12 Great Holy Days
 (see monthly newsletter for exact times and dates)

September

13	Sat	5:00 pm	Vigil and Elevation of the Cross	
14	Sun	9:00 am	Liturgy	The Elevation of the Cross

November

20	Thu	7:00 pm	Vespers	
21	Fri	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

December

24	Wed	8:00 am	Royal Hours & Vesperal Liturgy	Nativity Eve
		10:00 pm	Vigil Liturgy	Nativity of our Lord

2009

January

5	Mon	7:00 pm	Vespers	
6	Tue	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Theophany of our Lord and Blessing of Water

February

1	Sun	After Coffee hour	Vespers	
2	Mon	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Presentation of our Lord

March

24	Tue	7:00 pm	Vespers	
25	Wed	6:30 pm	Vesperal Liturgy	Annunciation to the Theotokos

August

5	Thu	7:00 pm	Vespers	
6	Fri	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Transfiguration of Our Lord
14	Fri	7:00 pm	Vespers	
15	Sat	9:00 am	Liturgy	Dormition of the Theotokos

September

7	Mon	7:00 pm	Vespers	
8	Tue	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Nativity of the Theotokos
13	Sun	After Coffee hour	Vespers	
14	Mon	6:30 pm	Liturgy	Elevation of the Cross

November

20	Fri	7:00 pm	Vespers	
21	Sat	9:00 am	Liturgy	Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

December

24	Thu	8:00 am	Royal Hours & Vesperal Liturgy	Nativity Eve
		10:00 pm	Vigil Liturgy	Nativity of our Lord