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The Cathedral Messenger

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Getting Back to Normal

By Fr. Paul O'Callaghan

At this juncture, we have lived with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for a full year. Life during this time has been far from normal. Church life has been deeply affected as has been just about every other form of human endeavor.

As I have pointed out both in print and from the pulpit, our normal parish life peaked on Sunday, March 8, 2020 – the Sunday of Orthodoxy. On that day we had over 100 children in the icon procession. The Cathedral was packed. Parish life overall was dynamic and healthy.

Then the bottom dropped out. Attendance the following Sunday was reduced by half. By the third Sunday of Great Lent 2020, we were subjected to the 10 person maximum mandate.

In the months since last year's low points, we have slowly been rebuilding our liturgical life and parish activity in general. By mid-September 2020, it appeared that the infection rate was abating, and so we resumed regular SOYO meetings, in-person bible studies, and other meetings and activities. But the reprieve would be short lived. In November, it became apparent that coronavirus was on the march again, and the situation only worsened throughout the holiday season. January saw the highest infection rates to date in Sedgwick County and it our parish in particular.

The good news is that since that "3rd wave" peak, infection rates have consistently declined, resulting locally in the lowest percentage of positive test results since the pandemic began. Consequently, we have once again begun



to open up attendance at Divine Liturgy, and unlike last year, we are performing the full cycle of Lenten services.

Thus it was a particular joy for us to celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy once again with the children's icon procession. Although we had about half the number of the children as last year, nonethe-

less there were many parishioners in attendance that we had not seen since the pandemic swooped down upon us. Attendance on the next Sunday, the second Sunday of Great Lent, was the highest we have seen since last year's Sunday of Orthodoxy.

At the same time, SOYO, Women's Faith and Growth, Parish Council, and other study groups and committees have begun meeting in person again. Thus we have reason for cautious optimism. "Cautious" because we are almost exactly where we were last October, and we know what happened after that. "Cautious" because just recently, the CDC Director almost tearfully warned of developing signs of an approaching "4th surge." We are not out of the woods yet.

Yet note that the word "cautious" modifies the word "optimism". "Optimism" because increasing rates of vaccination, on top of the immunity of those who have recovered from infection, may greatly reduce any future spread. Our parish life is gradually getting back to normal. Let us continue to practice appropriate cautionary measures, while imploring the Lord to deliver us from this "noisome pestilence" which afflicts us. God willing, we will soon see our parish life flourish again, as it was prior to the pandemic.

Dean, V. Rev. Paul O'Callaghan • St. George Orthodox Christian Cathedral

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CLASS OF 2021

Ceridwyn Nicole Alleman
 Rhys Ashton
 Hannah Doom
 Kiarra Farha
 Mark Hourani
 Marc Jamail
 Celine Khalife
 Alex Mandanis
 Caitlin Mattar
 Iain Moufarrij
 Noah Moufarrij
 David Spencer
 Serena Zakharina

Join US! May 16th - tentative
 to Honor Our Cathedral Graduates and for the
 presentation of the Kouri/Cohlma Scholarships

MABROOK! BLESSINGS!

MANY YEARS!

marriage
 Austin and Lauren Lewis David, 2/20
 in OKC

birth
 Zeina Alexandra Humsi, 3/20
 daughter of Danny and Grace



Home Blessings

Home blessings are to be performed during the Theophany season – from January 6 to the beginning of the Pre-Lenten (Tri-odion) that starts on the Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican. They are not done during Great Lent.

Each year we publish notice in the bulletin and Messenger for arranging home blessings during the Theophany season. This year, very few appointments were made at that time. For some reason, however, since the beginning of Great Lent, the office has been receiving requests for home blessings. Please be mindful, and schedule your home blessing during the proper period.

Home blessings can be done after Pascha and beyond, particularly when one has taken up residence in a new home. Otherwise, arrange for your home to be blessed during the Theophany season. Your attention to this is appreciated!

APRIL  **FASTING**

There is an allowance for fish and wine on Palm Sunday, April 25. Fasting resumes during Holy Week with abstinence from all meats, dairy products, flesh fish, with allowance for wine after the Liturgy on Holy Saturday morning. Bright Week, May 2-8 is fast-free, and an Antiochian tradition allows for fast-free observance during the 40 days of Pascha.

Archdiocese Scholarships available for new or returning undergraduate college students

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

Francis Maria Scholarship Application 2021
 Awards of \$5,000 each

Application available at:

<https://antiochianprodsa.blob.core.windows.net/websiteattachments/Francis%20Maria%20Scholarship%20Application%202021%20v4.pdf>

Send completed application to: Kathleen@OrthodoxYouth.com
 Or Francis Maria Scholarship Antiochian Archdiocese Scholarships Director PO Box 389 Westwood MA 02090-0389

The most recent communiqué from Metropolitan Joseph to his clergy contained the following directive concerning masking in church:



Masks should continue to be worn in church, however, in those areas of greatly decreasing numbers, where the state government allows, the faithful may lower or remove their masks for periods of time. When people move about the church or enter or exit, masks should continue to be worn.



Why Bother with Fasting?

(Excerpted from the writings of
St. John of Kronstadt (19th century))

We are told: It is no big deal to eat non-Lenten food during Lent. It is no big deal if you wear expensive beautiful outfits, go to the theater, to parties, to masquerade balls, use beautiful expensive china, furniture, expensive carriages, and dashing steeds, amass and hoard things, etc. Yet what is it that turns our heart away from God, away from the Fountain of Life? Because of what do we lose eternal life? Is it not because of gluttony, of expensive clothing like that of the rich man of the Gospel story; is it not because of theaters and masquerades? What turns us hard-hearted toward the poor and even toward our relatives? Is it not our passion for sweets, for satisfying the belly in general, for clothing, for expensive dishes, furniture, carriages, for money and other things? Is it possible to serve God and mammon, to be a friend to the world and a friend to God, to serve Christ and Belial? That is impossible.

Christians Should Bring Calm to Conflict

Adapted from Foundations of Truth

1 Corinthians 13:7, the famous passage on Christian love, declares "love believes all things," reminding fellows in Christ to give one another the benefit of the doubt. Sadly, most Americans have become increasingly unwilling to provide this benefit. In 2019, Pew Research Center found that 49% of Americans think citizens' trust in each other has fallen because people have become less reliable.

With the vitriol that is being leveled by both sides, is it any wonder that George Washington warned Americans against forming factions in his farewell address? This ideological conflict is especially heartrending to Christians. Those who consider themselves Christians can still be found across the political spectrum. These brothers and sisters in Christ run the risk of being pitted against one another by proxy because of the political philosophies of factional leaders.

During times in which there is pressure to turn against our fellow Christians, it is important to remember the wisdom

Why did Adam and Eve lose paradise, why did they fall into sin and death? Was it not because of one evil? Let us attentively consider why we do not care about the salvation of our soul, which cost the Son of God so dearly. Why do we compound sin upon sin, fall endlessly into opposing God, into a life of vanity? Is it not because of a passion for earthly things and especially for earthly pleasures? What makes our hearts become crude? Why do we become flesh and not spirit, perverting our moral nature? Is it not because of a passion for food, drink, and other earthly comforts? How, after this, can one say that it does not matter whether you eat non-Lenten food during Lent? The fact that we talk this way is in fact pride, idle thoughts, disobedience, refusal to submit to God, and separation from Him.



of Colossians 3:15, which says, "therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Despite the temptation to categorically condemn or endorse certain political views, Christians need to remember to be kind and humble. Most Christians are trying their best.

The temperature of our political exchanges needs to be turned down. As ambassadors of Christ, it is our job to act in ways that set us apart from this world. Perhaps we could begin by giving our brothers and sisters in Christ the benefit of the doubt.

Orthodoxy in America: An Uphill Climb

By Fr. Paul O'Callaghan



When Metropolitan Philip received the leaders of the Evangelical Orthodox Church into the Orthodox Church of Antioch in 1987, their stated mission was to “make America Orthodox.” They boldly set a goal of “2000 new churches by 2000.” Some of us thought this rather unrealistic then, and the passage of time proved that to be the case.

While there are many non-Orthodox who love and admire the Orthodox Church – Prof. Jordan Peterson is a good example – it seems that for the majority of Americans, Orthodoxy is “not for them.” Orthodox writers have spilled a lot of ink discussing this. Oftentimes the reasons offered tend to revolve around Orthodoxy being too ethnic, exotic, foreign, unknown, or exclusive.

No doubt such factors play a role. But I believe there is a more important reason Orthodoxy is a “hard sell” to Americans. Orthodoxy runs counter to the prevailing dispositions of the modern American character. Some of these tendencies are toward hedonism, informationalism, pragmatism, and individualism. In this article, I’m going to discuss hedonism.

Hedonism is the outlook that the supreme value in life is the attainment of pleasure. One should note, however, that this doesn’t necessarily mean that the hedonist is on a constant mad search to indulge his every appetite and desire. Hedonism can be more refined than that. Many hedonists strive for satisfactions and fulfillments that are more sophisticated than the mere indulgence of physical lusts. Overall, however, their supreme goal is the same: attaining the things that bring them satisfaction and pleasure.

The hedonistic attitude is so pervasive in modern America that it goes mostly unnoticed. No one notices it because everyone is caught up in it. It is so much taken for granted that no one questions it. People tend to only talk about the particular satisfactions they are pursuing, not whether pleasure should be the goal of life. The only question is, “What is your particular brand of pleasure?”

One only needs to pay attention to American advertising to see that it is everywhere. We are constantly bombarded with messages designed to entice us to purchase and use products that will bring us pleasure and satisfactions – from mere physical sensations to the attainment of our fullest personal potential.

Even many churches and evangelists preach a hedonistic gospel. “Jesus will make your life maximally fulfilling!” “God wants you to succeed and prosper.” “Christ will give you the keys to a more satisfying marriage.” In all such cases, the pleasure, satisfaction, or fulfillment is the goal. Jesus is just a means to that end.

Other forms of hedonism are more base, vulgar, and vicious. I recently read an online article, “7 reasons America is the most hedonistic country in the world.” The author, who is not a Christian, made his point by showing how American society exalts each of the seven deadly sins: lust, greed, envy, gluttony, sloth, wrath, and pride. He made his case compellingly.

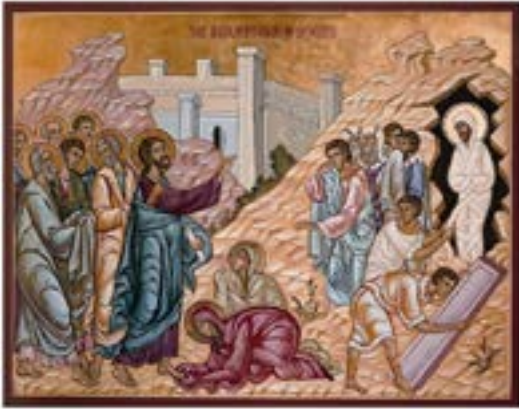
How does Orthodoxy fit with hedonism? Like a square peg in a round hole. It’s not that Orthodox Christianity condemns all forms of pleasure, satisfaction, or fulfillment in this world – one needs only to experience Greek or Lebanese cuisine to find living proof of that. It simply proclaims that such things are to be enjoyed in moderation, and never be allowed to obscure the true goal of human life: union with God.

The attainment of union with God requires asceticism, that is, self denial, the restraint of passions, the purification of the heart, and the evisceration of the ego. It renounces personal satisfactions for the sake of love God and neighbor.

Asceticism is the polar opposite of hedonism. The season of Great Lent gives us invaluable instruction in that fact. Thus the Church tells us, “you can’t eat whatever you want,” “you can’t have every form of sex you may desire” “give, rather than spending on yourself” “stand for long periods in church rather than sitting in a comfortable loge chair” and many other such affronts to the pleasure-seeking mentality. It doesn’t promise any form of worldly fulfillment; it upholds the martyrs as the epitome of life well-lived.

For this reason then, Orthodoxy will remain a tough sell in modern American culture. Yet for the minority that looks beyond the pleasures and fulfillments of this life, it offers the pearl of great price: glorification and participation in the divine life of our Eternal Creator.

GREAT FRIDAY VIGIL



All are more than WELCOME
to participate in the Holy Friday All Night Vigil!
A sign-up board will be placed by the Chapel

Community Support

by Traci Spencer

we'd love to have you join us!

"for I was hungry and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" — Matthew 25: 35-36

Completed Projects

THE LORD'S DINER

On Sunday, March 21st, St. George volunteers served the homeless in our community from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Thank you for your heart for feeding the homeless in our community. Join us the third Sunday of every month to serve at The Lord's Diner. Please call Mikell Awwad at 250-3016 if you are able to serve.

What's Coming Up?

2021 Agencies that we will support

- Kansas Food Bank
- Wichita Children's Home
- Victory in the Valley
- Family Crisis Center
- Cash for Classrooms
- Starkey
- Real Men, Real Heroes
- Hope Net
- Treehouse
- Lord's Diner
- DUI Red Ribbon
- Robin's House

LORD'S DINER

On Sunday, April 18th, St. George volunteers will be serving the homeless in our community from 5:00-7:30. Please let Mikell Awwad know if you can serve at 250-3016.

Next Meeting Tuesday, April 13th

12:00 noon in the Conference Room.

We would love to have you join us!!

We will decide projects and giving needs for our 2021 agencies! Please consider sharing your gifts and talents with our community. Please contact Traci Spencer at 371-5599 if you would like to be involved.

Paschal Baskets



You are encouraged to bring a basket of your favorite desserts, meats and wines with you to the Paschal Liturgy. They are to be placed in the baptismal area and will be blessed at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

Holy Saturday & Pascha



May 1 • 10:00a *Vespers Divine Liturgy*

May 2 • Paschal Service Times - TBA

The Challenge of the EQUALITY ACT

By the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President,
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

(Slightly edited by Fr. Paul O'Callaghan to
remove specifically Lutheran content)

The words of the apostle Peter apply to us now:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. (1 Peter 1:3–8)

The Church's task is not political. It is the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus for all (1 Cor. 1:23; John 18:36).

God rules His church by His eternal Word, testified to in the Holy Scriptures (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:15–16). God rules the state by His eternal law, reason and reasonable laws for the common welfare. The Church should not meddle in government affairs, especially in matters upon which the Word of God is silent. It is also wrong when governments act against God's eternal law, reason and the basic civil rights of all people. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enshrines this truth. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Throughout history, governments have acted unjustly — sometimes in the name of race, atheism, commu-



nism, religion and even Christianity — and curtailed or denied the rights of conscience and the free exercise of religion. And governments continue to do so. Our biblical confession is that "it is necessary for Christians to be obedient to their rulers and laws. The only exception is when they are commanded to sin. Then they ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29, see 1 Peter 2:13–14).

St. Paul made use of his legal right as a Roman citizen ("I appeal to Caesar" Acts 25:11). Our God-given right to act as citizens is very important, especially now.

The Equality Act is before Congress. It sounds innocent. All Americans should enjoy equality and the protections of the U.S. Constitution. But in elevating sexual orientation to a protected class, the Equality Act will bring sweeping changes to current laws, to the great detriment of the religious and constitutional freedoms of biblically faithful churches, institutions, Christian schools and individuals.

Jesus referred to Genesis 2:24, when He stated:

"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matt. 19:4–6)

In fact, those churches and institutions that are bound by the Word of God to the truth of marriage between a man and a woman, and that sex outside of that institution is contrary to the word of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:2), could be punished for simply standing on our consistent, ancient Christian beliefs. The Equality Act effectively outlaws the words of Christ, the sublime doctrine of Creation, the First Article of the Creed, and our “free exercise of religion” based upon the Bible and Apostles’ Creed. The biblical teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman is to be labeled forever a mere “sex-based stereotype.”

The Equality Act expands the definition of “public accommodation” and puts an ultimatum to individuals, religious non-profits, food banks, schools, charities, adoption agencies and others: “Change your faith-based practices or face government punishment.” Religious schools (K-12 and universities) are a prime target of the Equality Act, which will make it difficult to maintain standards for admission and codes of Christian conduct for students, faculty and staff. The Equality Act will forbid college students from using federal tuition assistance at schools that maintain standards of conduct on the basis of the Bible regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sex-specific facilities and female-only spaces could be eliminated. Biological males will have the right to participate in female sports, unjustly denying female athletes at our schools a fair competition and the due rewards of accomplishment.

The Equality Act will eliminate the significant protections of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, passed by Congress and signed into law in 1993. This law has provided strong protections for “free exercise of religion” in the face of overzealous officials. The Equality Act contains no conscience protections for medical staff who choose not to perform abortions, even if they have religious objections. Because of its broad definition of “health” services, the Equality Act threatens the Hyde Amendment, which limits public funding for abortion. It also threatens Christian hospitals with elimination of funding for not performing “health” services, including abortion or genital mutilation.

The Equality Act was recently passed by the House and is currently pending in the Senate. The margin is razor thin. If it does not become law now, we can be assured that it will be pressed again.

We encourage all Christian people to:

1. Treat all people with kindness and respect (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” Mark 12:31), while holding firmly to “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).
2. Become informed about the Equality Act and the issues of gender dysphoria. (See “Additional Resources” below.)
3. Consider your role as Christian citizens and make your voice known to your elected officials, particularly in the U.S. House (house.gov/representatives) and Senate (senate.gov/senators/index.htm).
4. Pray for our officials, government and the church in these challenging days.

Martin Luther once said, “Christ dwells only in sinners.” We recognize ourselves as sinners constantly in need of Christ’s forgiveness. We recognize the truth of the apostle Peter’s words, “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). We know that Jesus’ opponents grumbled against Him by saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). This comforting verse applies to us sinners, and we welcome all others to join us at the feet of Jesus, the sole Savior of all (John 3:16). As Christians, we believe that God has created all people, and all are infinitely valuable and accountable to Him. As Christian citizens, we recognize and demand basic God-given civil rights for all people, even as we insist on the First Amendment rights of Christians.

No matter the course of this or any legislation, Christ will sustain His Church. Our hope is not in laws, Congress or courts. Our hope is Christ. “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:8–9, 13–17)

The Cathedral Messenger

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Food for the Hungry



We urge you, during this season of prayer, self-discipline and fasting, to be very generous in your contribution to this campaign. As we practice the virtues which cleanse our souls, let us not forget or refrain from the “greatest of the virtues.” As important as prayer and fasting are, they are of no avail to us if we fail to give to those in need.

If you would like to give, please make your check payable to **St. George Cathedral - earmark “FFHP”**

“When you see a poor person, remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ by which He declared that it is He, Himself who is fed. For though that which appears be not Christ, yet in that person’s form, it is Christ Himself who receives and begs.”

--St. John Chrysostom,
“Homilies on Mathew” #78.