

Listen to him.” By this sign, the disciples would come to understand that the Lord suffered and died voluntarily, for our sake.

We will observe the eve on Saturday, Aug. 5, with Vigil at 6 PM (for our parish, just Vespers plus the Canon and Gospel from Matins). For the feast itself on Saturday, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 9:30 AM.

You are welcome to bring fruits and vegetables for a blessing after either service.

The Dormition (Falling-Asleep) of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary on Aug.

15. On the eve, Friday, Aug. 14, at 6 PM, we will celebrate with Vespers and Liturgy in the temple, followed by the blessing of flowers. The Dormition is a foretaste of the universal hope of life following death. In the feast’s icon (which we can see on the ceiling of our church), we see the Theotokos laid out upon her funeral bier, but her Son bearing her up to heaven, as a new-born babe. We glorify her, and pray that, on the last day, all of us may be carried into new life!

We are happy to announce the planned baptism of Henry Joseph Pannone, son of Rebecca and Michael. It will take place during the Liturgy on Sunday, Aug. 21.

Save the Date: **FORCC Benefit Banquet**
Sunday, September 25, 2022
St. Dimitrie Orthodox Church Easton, CT

Rector’s Letter

August, 2022

Dear brothers and sisters:

The Orthodox Church in America concluded its 20th All-American Council (AAC) this July. Over five hundred bishops, other clergy and faithful attended from all over North America, including Alaska and Mexico. From our parish, Mary Jane Rodgers joined me as a delegate, while Thomas Crosby and Elias Mosher were observers, and Ephraim Mosher volunteered with the AAC Youth Program. Mary Jane will provide her own report to the Annual Meeting, but I wanted to share some reflections with you now.

This year’s theme was “Becoming Vessels of Grace,” alluding to St. Paul who writes:

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.... For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.
(2 Corinthians 4:6-7, 15)

Grace is a free gift from God, not something we generate or accomplish ourselves. The vessels are humble and often cracked, but that only reveals more clearly the unearthly glory within them. At the same time, we have a purpose and a task that we must not disregard: to carry this treasure in our hearts, to learn from it daily and to share it with all those around us.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon reflected on vessels both in the sense that St. Paul used—a container—but even more in the other meaning: a ship or boat. If we set to sea, we need to keep in mind our destination throughout our journey. We were created by God and set on this journey with the Holy Spirit as our wind and our guide and with eternal life in communion with God as our end.

Overshadowed by the COVID crisis, the OCA celebrated the 50th anniversary of our autocephaly. That strange term means that our Church has its own primate (Metropolitan Tikhon) and does not depend on a Mother Church (such as Russia or Constantinople) for its sacramental life and governance. The grant of autocephaly in 1970 was a fulfillment of the Russian mission to Alaska with St. Herman, begun in 1794. It recognizes that the peoples of North America have faithfully received the grace of the Holy Spirit and continue to witness to the fullness of the Orthodox Faith. This witness is not perfect and there is pressing need for greater unity and repentance, but it is real.

Around the Parish

Join us for a short morning service of **Weekday Matins on Wednesdays at 8:15 AM**, starting this month. This service of morning prayer has been simplified and lasts about thirty minutes, yet still offering divine wisdom and refreshment.

Dormition Fast: Aug. 1–14. The fast begins with the Procession of the Holy Cross and ends with the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15. The remembrance of the Cross reminds us of our own precious responsibility to follow the way of Jesus Christ, while the Dormition reminds us of our hoped-for end, welcomed into Paradise by Christ's own mother. Don't let these few days slip past unnoticed.

On Tuesday, Aug. 2, our parish is planning to participate in **National Night Out** in Hubbard Park, Meriden. This community-building celebration involves numerous organizations all encouraging Meriden kids to find opportunities for their energies. We plan to set up a tent and table, to serve out water, share information, and engage in friendly conversations. Volunteers are welcome!

We will celebrate the **Transfiguration of the Lord** on Aug. 6. We remember how the Lord took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, up to Mount Tabor. There he was transfigured, revealing his divine glory to them as far as they could bear it. The disciples saw Moses and Elijah standing with the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son.

It set an example for our own community as well. Every Sunday, we sing after receiving communion: “We have seen the true Light! We have received the heavenly Spirit! We have found the true Faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, who has saved us.” We have received these amazing, life-changing gifts of grace—now it is time for our lives to change! People should recognize something different from the rest of the world in how you think and act, how you prioritize your day, how you care for what God has entrusted to you, and how you treat others.

The Chancellor of the OCA, Fr. Alexander Rentel, encouraged the kids after the Youth Program’s presentation. He thanked them but then challenged them to be ambitious in finding ways to serve the Lord and his Church. “Go to seminary, for goodness sake!” At the feast of St. Elijah, we listened to some of the best Bible Stories we have, one of which concludes with the prophet fleeing to Mt. Horeb to meet the Lord. Fire, tempest and earthquake came, but the Lord was not in them. Then came a still, small voice, and the Lord told him just what he needed to hear.

Don’t expect God to sky-write a message to you with Elijah’s fiery chariot. Quiet yourself and wait for that still, small voice to speak to you. You also are meant to be a vessel of grace.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. John S. Mathew

The Orthodox Church in America is not the Orthodox Church *of* America—it is not fully recognized by all the historic Churches even though it maintains communion with them all. But the OCA is consistent and courageous in calling all to unity, here and throughout the world. Despite its youth and lack of recognition, it is able to speak and be heard in love in this time of great divisions among Orthodox Churches, in Russia and Constantinople, and in Ukraine. The AAC took particular effort to acknowledge and support the difficult ministry of Metropolitan Onuphry of Kiev.

It also is exemplary in holding itself accountable. The financial reports of the OCA are thorough and transparent, and are readily available at oca.org. (Mary Jane and I had to sort through 400 pages just from them!) This year’s AAC featured a controversy over the condition of the OCA Pension Plan. A remarkable consensus arose that action is required to ensure better communication between the Metropolitan Council (which functions at a national level like our Parish Council) and the Pension Board, and that the Pension Fund needs shoring up with several specific steps. This probably means parishes will need to increase pension contributions a bit more, while national administrative costs are re-examined.

We took particular account of our gratitude to the Diocese of Alaska, the spiritual fountainhead of the whole Orthodox Church in America. Our story starts there, along with our ongoing

mission to all America. Yet the Alaskan peoples themselves are often overlooked. A comparative handful of priests travel vast and difficult terrain to visit the several churches which each of them cares for. In a cash-poor society, they receive an average annual stipend of \$7200. Some of them are paid nothing at all! Bishop Alexei of Alaska has recently established a Clergy Endowment Fund, in order to provide stable supplementary stipends. Concerned that this worthy effort would receive momentary applause and no sustained attention, Fr. Nikolay Miletkov and I proposed a resolution to set a date for an annual OCA appeal for this fund. The resolution was embraced by the AAC, and you will hear more on the feast of St. Herman on Dec. 13.

I was encouraged by the hope and determination expressed in a wide array of other endeavors. The Diocese of Mexico is building St. Basil's Pastoral Academy to train more missionary priests. Our seminaries announced new initiatives. (St. Vlad's also announced a bumper crop of new seminarians!) The Office of Pastoral Life has creatively addressed the need to encourage greater spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical health of our clergy. The Departments of the OCA have been radically reformed to adjust to current realities—one initiative that drew my attention was a new catechism for adults that will be freely available for download.

Our new bishops proved to be encouraging "vessels of grace" themselves. Bishop Alexei of Alaska is a profound theologian formed in a deep

and healthy tradition from Mount Athos. Bishop Andrei, auxiliary to Archbishop Nathaniel of the Roman Episcopate, won our hearts with his deft pastoral cheer and especially for "playing hookie" the first two days to stay with the Youth Program. Bishop Gerasim is well-regarded in the South, while Bishop Daniel was elected to the Diocese of the Midwest right before the opening of the AAC. More are on the way.

Always, the true highlights of an All-American Council are the fellowship and worship. In addition to many old friends, I got to meet delegates from Alaska, Canada and Mexico, as well as one from Hawaii. The choirs were beautiful from the start and improved with practice. Tom, Elias and Mary Jane all participated, and Tom took many notes on fresh arrangements we may want to try in Meriden! (One surprise treat was the national debut of an arrangement of the Trisagion "Holy God" by Mark Yuschak of Christ the Savior, Southbury, who has sung at our church and arranged a piece for our parish feast this year.) Nothing could top the celebration of St. Elijah on July 20, a glorious day regardless but sublime at this AAC.

If you would like to hear some of these services, read the proceedings, or scan through the great photos, visit oca.org/aac.

That, as briefly as I could manage, was my experience of the All-American Council. It was as healthy as I can recall, even when the focus was on the cracks in those vessels of grace.