

# ***THE APOSTLE*** **MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

## **MARCH 2016**

# **SAINT MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF IRVINE**

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**Very Rev. Father Michael Laffoon, Pastor**

Residence phone: (949) 559-6133

**Rev Fr. Patrick Irish, Attached**

**Rev. Protodeacon George Moubayed**

**Sub-deacon: Athanasius Fakhouri**

**Choir Director: Barbara Scholl**

**Chanters: Jacob Bahbah, Theresa Joubran, Karim**

**Youssef, & Mark Ellis & Jake Bahbah**

**Church Office Administrator: Lydia Wakileh**

**Teen's Advisors: Paula Rodriguez & Dana Chade**

### **2015-2016 PARISH COUNCIL**

**Chairman - Randy Dabbah {17}** (949) 293-7732

**Vice Chairman – Barbara Scholl {18}** (949) 533-4634

**Secretary – Dimitri Kort {18}** (909) 529-3671

**Treasurer - Fouad Tarazi {16}** (949) 637-0621

**Assistant Treasurers- Kyra Pelachik {18}** (714) 906-9231 & **Dimitri Kort {18}** (909) 529-3671

**Afifa Artoul {16}** (949) 215-2305

**Ghassan Awayjan {17}** (951) 454-5429

**Joe Daruty {17}** (949) 612-7939

**Richard Jirjis {16}** (949) 552-7424

**Paula Rodriguez {16}** (949) 922-9916

[Number in brackets is the member's last year of his or her current term]

**Church School Director:** Eileen Ellis (949) 458-1604

**Men's Club President:** Ibrahim Khamis (714) 962-7367

**Antiochian Women of St. Mark President:** Denise Nassif (949) 500-8318

**Teen SOYO President:** Grace Bahbah (714) 401-2094

### **Pastor's Column**

Beloved in Christ,

*Lent begins on March 14 and we are even now, in the Church calendar preparing for this. With this in mind, please read and ponder the article reprinted below!*

During Great Lent, and in the next several weeks the Church calls us to do what we should be doing all year round. We are instructed to fast, pray, do charitable works, worship in the church, and so on. We must also include in the list participation in the Sacrament of Holy Confession. In his book, "The Lenten Spring," Fr. Thomas Hopko (Dean Emeritus of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary) addresses some of the questions and issues regarding this neglected sacrament.

*It is not enough for us to know our sins and hate them. We must also confess them before God and man. We must acknowledge them before heaven and earth. We must expose them to the whole of creation in order to be rid of them from within our secret hearts. Confession is part of the spiritual life. Indeed it is part of life itself. There is no authentic existence for human beings without it. And there is certainly no authentic repentance. "If we say we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 John 1:8-10)*

*Some say that there is no need to confess sins openly and publicly. They say that people can confess directly to God. Such an idea is total nonsense. Confession to God in secret is no confession at all. It is simply the acknowledgment before the Lord that we know what He knows! Confession by definition is open and public. If it is not, it is simply not confession.*

*When the people were repenting in preparation for Jesus at the preaching of John the Baptist, it is written that they were baptized "confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). This does not mean that they were telling God in the privacy of their hearts what He already knew. It means that they were proclaiming the evils that they had done for all to hear. And St. James commands Christians: "Confess your sins to one another!" he is not advising them to be aware of their transgressions in the secrecy of their souls. He is ordering them to reveal their wickednesses to each other so that they might be healed (James 5:16)*

*If confession is by definition the open and public acknowledgment of sins, why then do the Orthodox confess privately to their priests? It is not because the priests have some special power which others do not have... Priests have no power personally to forgive sins. Only Jesus Christ has such power. But the pastors have the ministry of witnessing the confession and repentance of God's people, and of officially sealing that confession and repentance with the assurance of divine forgiveness through the prayers of absolution.*

*The reason why people now confess to their pastors in private is because of the weakness of the body of Christians as a whole. Confession used to be public. It was done openly in the presence of all the members of the Church. Anyone willing to confess in this manner today is welcome to do so. But it would most likely serve only to lead other in temptation rather than to*

*inspire prayerful compassion... When confession is done to the priest alone, it should be understood that it is to him as if it were it were to all. Or to put it another way, it is to all - God and man and the whole of creation - in the priest's person as the head of the church community and the sacramental presence within it of the Lord Jesus Himself.*

*Great Lent is a time for confession. All Christians should make their confession. A person who does not is hardly a Christian. He is certainly not Orthodox.*

*Fr. Michael*

**THE LENTEN FAST (Lent begins on March 14)**  
**During Great Lent, the rules of the dietary fast are thus: All of Lent and Holy Week we are to abstain from all meat and animal products (including eggs, milk, animal fats, etc.) The only exceptions are shellfish. In addition, Mondays through Fridays, we are to abstain from wine and other alcoholic drinks and olive oil. This is the "letter of the law." It is important for you and your family to participate in the "spirit of the law", working out this Lenten effort within your household in ways pleasing to God and beneficial for the soul. We all must be reminded that the purpose of the dietary fast is to help us to fast from sin and ungodliness! If you have questions regarding Lenten discipline, please see Fr. Michael.**

**SPECIAL SERVICES/EVENTS IN MARCH**

**Monday March 14, Start of Great Lent –**  
Services every evening (see calendar for details)

**Sunday March 20 is the First Sunday of Lent –**  
**There will be an Orange County Sunday of Orthodoxy Service at St. Mark Orthodox Church at 6:00 p.m. (flyer attached)**

**Lenten Week Day Service Schedule**

Mondays Great Compline 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts,  
6:30 p.m.

Friday Little Compline with Akathist Hymn,  
6:30 p.m.

**Friday March 25, Evening Liturgy, Feast of the Annunciation 6:30 p.m.**

**April 2016 Advanced Calendar**  
April 24, Palm Sunday  
April 25 to April 30 Holy Week

**WEEKLY SERVICES**  
Saturday Vespers 4:00 p.m.  
Sunday Orthros 8:45 a.m. Confessions heard from 9:00 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.  
Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

## **Selected Saints of the Month**

**MARCH 3<sup>RD</sup>**

### **THE HOLY MARTYRS, EUTROPIUS, CLEONICUS AND BASILLISCUS**

They were companions of St. Theodore Tiro. When the righteous Theodore gloriously died, they remained behind in prison, and for a long time they were not sentenced due to a change in the emperor's deputy in the city of Amasea. When the new governor arrived, more inhuman than his predecessor, he ordered that these three be brought before him. All three were youths. Eutropius and Cleonicus were blood brothers, and Basilliscus was a kinsman of St. Theodore. All three were like blood brothers in brotherly love. As such, they said before the governor, "As the Holy Trinity is undivided, so also are we by our faith undivided and in love inseparable." In vain was all the flattery on the part of the governor and in vain were his attempts to bribe Eutropius. First of all, the deputy invited Eutropius to dine with him. Eutropius refused, quoting from the Psalms, "Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked" (Psalm 1:1). After that, the deputy offered him a large amount of money, one hundred-fifty litres of silver, which Eutropius also refused and reminded the governor that because of silver, Judas lost his soul. After all attempts at interrogation and torture, the first two were sentenced to be crucified, and Basilliscus was sentenced to be beheaded. And so it was, two

brothers crucified on two crosses for which they gave thanks to Christ that He made them worthy of the same death by which He Himself died. The third, Basilliscus, was beheaded. They all entered the Kingdom of Joy where St. Theodore, their commander, awaited them and who before them was glorified by Christ the Lord and Victor. They suffered honorably in the year 308 A.D.

**MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup>**

### **THE HOLY APOSTLE ARISTOBULUS, ONE OF THE SEVENTY APOSTLES**

Born in Cyprus, Aristobulus was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas. He followed the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans saying, "Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus" (Romans 16:10). When the great apostle appointed many bishops throughout the various parts of the world, he appointed Aristobulus as bishop for the British, that is, England. In Britain the people were savages, heathen and wicked. Aristobulus endured many indescribable tortures, misfortunes and evil among them. They struck and beat him mercilessly, dragged him about the streets, ridiculed and mocked him. Finally this holy man succeeded by the power of the Grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptized them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and, in the end, died there peacefully and entered into the Kingdom of the Lord, Whom he faithfully served.(\*)

(\* ) In the Greek Synaxarion the Venerable Christodulos is also mentioned on this day. He lived a life of asceticism on the island of Patmos, where he builds a monastery dedicated to St. John the Theologian. He died in the year 1111 A.D. Many miracles occurred over his relics.

**MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>**

### **THE ANNUNCIATION**

When the All-Holy Virgin completed the fourteenth year after her birth and was entering her fifteenth year, after having spent eleven years of living and serving in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests informed her that, according to the Law, she could not remain in the Temple but was required to be betrothed and enter into marriage. What a great surprise to the priests was the answer of the All-

Holy Virgin that she had dedicated her life to God and that she desired to remain a Virgin until death, not wanting to enter into marriage with anyone! Then, according to Divine Providence, Zacharias, the high priest and father of the Forerunner, under the inspiration of God, and in agreement with the other priests, gathered twelve unwed men from the Tribe of David to betroth the Virgin Mary to one of them to preserve her virginity and to care for her. She was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth who was her kinsman. In the house of Joseph, the All-Holy Virgin continued to live as she did in the Temple of Solomon, occupying her time in the reading of Sacred Scripture, in prayer, in Godly-thoughts, in fasting and in handiwork. She rarely went anywhere outside the house nor was she interested in worldly things and events. She spoke very little to anyone, if at all, and never without special need. More frequently she communicated with both of Joseph's daughters. When the fullness of time had come, as prophesied by Daniel the Prophet, and when God was pleased to fulfill His promise to the banished Adam and to the Prophets, the great Archangel Gabriel appeared in the chamber of the All-Holy Virgin and, as some priestly writers wrote, precisely at that same moment when she held open the book of the Prophet Isaiah and was contemplating his great prophecy: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son!" (Isaiah 7:13). Gabriel appeared in all of his angelic brightness and saluted her: "Rejoice, highly favored one! The Lord is with you" (St. Luke 1:28), and the rest in order as it is written in the Gospel of the saintly Luke. With this angelic annunciation and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin, the salvation of mankind and restoration of all creation began. The history of the New Testament was opened by the words of the Archangel Gabriel: "Rejoice, highly favored one" This is to imply that the New Testament was to signify joy to mankind and to all created things. It is from this that the Annunciation is considered not only a great feast, but a joyful feast as well.

## MARCH 31TH

### THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR HYPATIUS THE BISHOP OF GANGRA

Hypatius was born in Cilicia and was the bishop of Gangra. He was present at the First Ecumenical

Council [Nicaea, 325. A.D.] And was renowned throughout because of his pious and saintly life and his miracle-working. The Emperor Constantius ordered that a likeness of Hypatius be made during the saint's lifetime. The emperor kept this likeness in his palace as a weapon against all adverse powers. Once upon returning from Constantinople, Hypatius was attacked in a narrow gorge by Novatian heretics and, along with others, was hurled to the ground in mud. At that moment a woman from that group struck him in the head with a stone and, thus, the saint died. Immediately that woman went insane and took that same stone and struck herself with it. When they took her to the grave of St. Hypatius, he interceded before God on her behalf. She was healed by the great compassionate soul of Hypatius and lived the remainder of her life in repentance and prayer. St. Hypatius died and took up habitation in the eternal Kingdom of Christ the God, in the year 326 A.D.

## Parish & Organizations News

### St. Mark 2016 Stewardship Pledge Drive Progress Report

Thank you to all of you who have made their 2016 Pledge Commitment to St. Mark. As of February 25th, we have a total of \$168,461 pledged which is 84% of our total goal of \$200,000. We have also successfully collected 118 pledge commitments!

We are getting closer to reaching our goal!! If you haven't made your pledge commitment yet then please take a few minutes today during Coffee Hour to fill out a pledge card.

*In Christ, St. Mark Stewardship Committee*

### Antiochian Women of St. Mark

The Antiochian women of St. Mark had their Meeting Sunday, February 7, 2016 Opening Prayer: Prayer was lead by President, Denise Nassif. There were 16 ladies in attendance and a new member, Suzanna Maatook. Welcome Suzanna!

Treasurer Report: Giselle Awayjan gave a quick overview of our current balance. A check was issued

to St. Mark Church for \$2,500 for the 2016 annual dues. There is a balance after that of around \$8,000. Sunshine Report: Khouria Donna Laffoon was not available for the meeting.

Script Report: Saeda Turk was not available for the meeting.

Old Business: - The skirts for the kitchen and ladies bathroom sinks were completed by Lori Nour and with the help of Lydia were hung. –

The kitchen was organized by Lydia Wakileh, Donna Laffoon and Gisele Awayjan. The Parish Council Approved a refurbishing of the kitchen. Work will start on March 15<sup>th</sup>; New Freezer, Dishwasher, 2 stoves and Ice maker have been purchased too –

Valentine Party on February 13<sup>th</sup> was a success, chaired by Denise Nassif, assisted by the committee Lydia Wakileh and Gisele Awayjan

Thanks to Marty Morrison for helping in decorating and purchasing. Thanks to Carol & Roger Tierney for donating the Boat auction gift. Thanks to all the ladies who helped and donated the dessert for the party.

- March is Ladies Month. Lori Nour passed a sign-up sheet for ladies to participate in ushering and reading of the epistle. –

There will be a Ladies sponsored luncheon held during coffee hour on March 13<sup>th</sup> –

Cheesefare Sunday. A sign-up sheet is forthcoming.

- The ladies will sell Spinach Pies on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Pre-orders will be made 3 weeks prior to that and baking day for them will be Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>. - Denise Nassif made a suggestion to have a Ladies Outing at the Huntington Library and Museum in Pasadena. Denise will get estimates for this fun excursion day which would include bus transportation, park admission and high tea.

Closing Prayer: Fr. Laffoon Next Meeting: Sunday March 6<sup>th</sup> after church

*Lori Nour*

*Antiochian Women's Secretary*

### Men's Club

The Men's Club meeting was held on February 7<sup>th</sup> after Liturgy at the St. Mark Hall. (Prior to the Super Bowl party)

**Super Bowl Party:** The Super Bowl party was held on February 7<sup>th</sup> in the church hall. (\$10 per person). The Men's Club provided food and drinks. It was well attended and a good time was had by all. We sold squares for \$50.00 each for the football raffle

**Men's Club Focus Feeding:** The Men's Club had volunteered at the Focus Feeding on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Next Men's Club Meeting:** Thursday March 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Church.

*Respectfully submitted by  
Don Skaff/Men's Club Secretary*

### **Teen SOYO**

Sunday Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> we are held a SOYO Meeting after Sunday school to discuss future activities & general business.

At that meeting we voted on "The Book of Needs" item we are donating to the church from SOYO. We are pleased to be able to purchase a "Processional Banner at \$3,400.00!

Friday Jan. 29<sup>th</sup> we had a large SOYO group meet at church for Vespers. Then we caravanned to The Kaleidoscope in Mission Viejo where we met more kids who joined us for dinner & two games of Laser Tag! All in all we had 36 kids show up from San Diego to Valencia! It was a real fun night for the kids! Somehow, a large group of the older kids came back to our house to hang out till 1:30am!

The month of February is sort of busy for our Teens with St. Nicholas church camp retreat this last weekend & The Debutante Ball on Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>.

We are hoping to have a conference call officers meeting next week.

Upcoming Events:

We are tentatively planning an ice-skating event on Friday March 11..

We would like to meet at church for vespers and then caravan to Ice Palace in Aliso Viejo and then go out for dessert afterwards. More details to follow.

Financials:

Current SOYO Account Balance is \$4,400.00.  
(However there are still some outstanding reimbursements owed)

*Yours In Christ,  
Teen's Advisor; Paula Rodriguez*

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Sleiman Aldada 3/11  
Diana Aldada 3/4  
Joseph Attalla 3/27  
Sarah Asaly 3/10  
Gisele Awayjan 3/24  
Anahid Azzouni 3/19  
Jacob Bahbah 3/1  
Nicholas Bahou 5/26  
Wally Batarseh 3/12  
Lucy Billeh 3/20  
Samir Billeh 3/3  
Nuha Daher 3/23  
Mark El-Hinn 3/30  
Dina Elsayegh 3/30  
Nicole Fakhouri 3/1  
Katrina Fakhouri 3/26  
Carole Jo Goson 3/29  
Anton Hadoub 3/17  
Wetcka Haffty 3/19  
Sameer Hanna 3/17  
Amanda Hanna 3/25  
Mary –Margret Hanna 3/26  
George Hanna 3/21  
Fr. Patrick Irish 3/12  
Maurice Karkar 3/25  
Mitri Khamis 3/6  
Tanya Khamis 3/4  
Samir Khamis 3/20  
Amanda Khoury 3/5  
Melissa Khoury 3/19  
Najat Khury 3/20  
Elena Khury 3/29  
Jerri Mamey 3/26  
Nabil Mansour 3/24  
Linda Mokbel 3/31  
Liana Munayyer 3/3  
Walid Najjar 3/11  
Elizabeth Nassar 3/2  
Daniel Rizkallah 3/16  
Deena Salameh 3/23

Ramsey Samara 3/18  
Jamal Sayegh 3/3  
Samira Skaff 3/29  
Juliana Tannous (Turk) 3/4  
Richard Tierney 3/2  
Martha Toubbeh 3/30  
Isabella Turk 3/10  
Osama Turk 3/12  
Michael Wakileh 3/23  
Lydia Wakileh 3/25  
Matthew Whitacre 3/19

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Samir & Maysa Azzam 3/4  
Carlos & Rhonda Rodriguez 3/1  
George & Martha Toubbeh 3/28

*BUY SCRIP! Our Ladies Guild buys scrip from many and various stores and restaurants (see list included in this bulletin) at a 3 to 10% discount. When you buy the scrip, which is accepted just like cash at the issuing store, the parish benefits. You pay no more for these goods and services and are making a donation to our parish. You can purchase this scrip from Saeda Turk at the coffee hour.*

*The Apostle is a monthly newsletter of St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church. Parish Organizations are to submit articles by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month to the Church office (949-851-8933)*

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