

**THE APOSTLE**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
**MAY 2022**  
**ST. MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
**OF IRVINE**  
***CHRIST IS RISEN!***

A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian  
Archdiocese of North America  
Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York  
and Metropolitan of all North America  
17840 Sky Park Circle  
Irvine, CA 92614-6407  
Tel: (949) 851-8933  
Fax: (949) 851-0010  
Email: [frmlaffoon@gmail.com](mailto:frmlaffoon@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.st-mark-church.org](http://www.st-mark-church.org)

**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, Mark Ellis, Karim  
Youseff**  
**Teen Advisor: Fatin Fakhouri**

**2020 – 2021 PARISH COUNCIL**

**Chairman Kristin Chala {22}**  
**Vice Chairman – Penny Skaff {22}**  
**Secretary – Tony Rodriguez {24}**  
**Treasurer – Osama Kishek {23}**  
**Assistant Treasurer- Tammy Qutami {24}**  
**Imad Alchammas {23}**  
**Gisele Awayjan {23}**  
**Sly Aldada{24}**  
**Barbara Scholl {22}**  
**Robert Mokbel {22}**  
[Number in brackets is the member's last year of his  
or her current term]  
**Church School Co-Directors: Tammy Qutami and  
Kristin Chala**  
**Antiochian Women of St. Mark President: Paula  
Rodriguez & Rima Tarazi**  
**Teen SOYO President: Nour Youssef**  
**Advisor: Fatin Fakhouri**

**PASTOR'S CORNER**

Beginning on Pascha (April 24<sup>th</sup>, this year) for forty days we proclaim the Paschal greeting: Christ is Risen! The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the cornerstone of our Christian Faith. If there is no resurrection, then there is no basis for the Faith. We say that Christ has “trampled down death by death,” yet we are all too aware that there continues to be sin, tragedy, injustice, hypocrisy, betrayal and illness, war, murder and the like. How, then, is death overcome in the Resurrection? In this way: death is no longer the end of our hopes and aspirations, rather it is a passage (albeit a difficult one) to life in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus, being both God and man, broke down the dividing wall between humanity and God, making it possible for us to once again have communion with God, as did Adam and Eve before the Fall. This communion is made possible by our Lord's Pascha, that is to say by His Death on the Cross, and third day Resurrection.

The fact that the Crucifixion is inseparable from the Resurrection is most important. When Jesus comes again in glory, the end of earthly suffering and death will come, but in the meantime, Christ tells us that in order to be his disciples; we also must carry a cross. This means that we must expect to have to live with the consequences of sin (ours and others') and of the brokenness of this fallen world, just as Christ did, and to join our sufferings with His in order to share in his glory!

Along the way God does not leave us “on our own,” but grants us strength and comfort to

continue on the way. Indeed, in his merciful love, he grants us participation in the Kingdom to come even in this life (Holy Communion is the best, but not the only example of this).

So my dear ones, let us not be overwhelmed by the news of evil which we see and hear all of the time. As Christian believers throughout the centuries, let us remain people of hope. As such we must work for more justice, more peace, more good in the world, anticipating the day when Christ returns and "God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:3,4)

In this hope, in this the light that shines from the Empty Tomb, let us rejoice!

Truly He is Risen!

Fr. Michael

#### **A note on fasting during the 40 days of Pascha:**

It is the universal practice of the Orthodox Church to observe Bright Week (the week immediately following Pascha) as a fast free week. In earlier centuries, the entire 40 days of the Paschal season was fast free. This was changed later and Wednesdays and Fridays after Bright Week were observed as fast days as usual. Several years ago, the Holy Synod of Antioch decided to return to the earlier practice. Therefore fasting is relaxed on Wednesdays and Fridays until the Feast of the Ascension.

#### **Feasts, Special Services and Events for May 2022**

Sunday May 8, Mother's Day

Tuesday May 10, Adult Education resumes (6:45 p.m.)

#### **June 2022 Advanced Calendar**

Feast of the Ascension, June 2

Pentecost Sunday, June 12

Sunday June 19, Father's Day

June 29 – July 3, Western Diocese Parish Life Conference, Santa Clara CA

#### **SELECTED SAINTS OF THE MONTH**

**May 21<sup>st</sup>**

#### **The Holy Emperor Constantine and the Empress Helena.**

Constantine's parents were the emperor Constantius Chlorus and the Empress Helena. Chlorus had further children by another wife, but by Helena he had only the one, Constantine. Constantine fought two great battles when he came to the throne: one against Maxentius, a tyrant in Rome, and the other against Licinius not far from Byzantium. At the battle against Maxentius, when Constantine was in great anxiety and uncertainty about his chances of success, a shining cross, surrounded by stars, appeared to him in the sky in full daylight. On the cross were written the words; "In this sign, conquer!" The wondering Emperor ordered that a great cross be put together, like the one that had appeared, and be carried before the army. By the power of the Cross, he gained a glorious victory over enemies greatly superior in number. Maxentius drowned himself in the Tiber. Immediately after this, Constantine issued the famous Edict of Milan, in 313, to put an end to the persecution of Christians. Conquering Byzantium, he built a beautiful capital city on the Bosphorus, which from that time was named Constantinople. At this time, Constantine fell ill with leprosy. The pagan priests and doctors advised him to bathe in the blood of slaughtered children, which he refused to do. Then the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and told him to seek out a bishop, Sylvester, who would heal him of the disease. The bishop instructed him in the Christian faith and baptized him, and the leprosy vanished from the Emperor's body. When there was discord in the Church about the troublesome heretic Arius, the Emperor summoned the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, in 325, where the heresy was condemned and Orthodoxy confirmed.

St. Helena, the Emperor's devout mother, was very zealous for the Christian faith. She visited Jerusalem and found the Precious Cross of the Lord, and built the Church of the Resurrection over

Golgotha and many other churches in the Holy Land. This holy woman went to the Lord in 327, at the age of eighty. The Emperor Constantine outlived his mother by ten years and entered into rest at the age of about sixty in 337, in the city of Nicomedia. His body was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.

## PARISH & ORGANIZATION NEWS

### Teen SOYO

Our teens held their traditional Holy Friday Vigil over the Bier (Tomb) of Christ. Many teens participated. Thanks are due to the parent volunteers who made this event possible.

### Antiochian Women of St. Mark

Our ladies will hold a Fiesta for all Mothers on Thursday May 19. See attached flyer for details.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

June Anter 5/20  
 Ghassan Bahou 5/4  
 Steven Berooty 5/13  
 Maha Daher 5/25  
 Scott Daruty 5/19  
 Natalie Debbas 5/9  
 Mirna Debbas 5/29  
 George Debbas 5/18  
 Omar Fakhouri 5/2  
 Noah Fortuna 5/4  
 Josie Goson 5/28  
 Vera Jirjis 5/13  
 Michael Joellson 5/16  
 Bachir Kassir 5/30  
 Alexander Kashou 5/5  
 Michael Khoury 5/5  
 Maysoon Khoury 5/10  
 Kandy Kort 5/4  
 Elizabeth Kort 5/4  
 Emilie Laffoon 5/27  
 Natalie Maalouli 5/27  
 Ziad Mahshi 5/29  
 Anabella Mahshi 5/10  
 Rachael Mahshi 5/11  
 Nelson Mamey 5/29  
 Alexander Mokbel 5/31

George Richards 5/2  
 Sophia Richards 5/2  
 Ramez Sayegh 5/20  
 Natalia Soury 5/14  
 Fouad Tarazi 5/31  
 Richie Tierney 5/2  
 Anees Turk 5/4  
 Angelina Turk 5/29  
 Sophia Whitacre 5/20  
 Connor Wilde 5/8  
**Happy Anniversary**

Phillip & Tarize Bahbah 5/8  
 Jacob & Vera Bahbah 5/13  
 Samir & Lucy Billeh 5/2  
 Mark & Eileen Ellis 5/22  
 Kevin & Sara Fortuna 5/23  
 Richard & Mary Lou Gallade 5/20  
 Richard & Vera Jirjis 5/9  
 Bachir & Helen Kassir 5/27  
 Fr. Michael & Donna Laffoon 5/6  
 Elias & Najat Khury 5/1  
 Jhonny & Sonia Liquete 5/17  
 Nelson & Jerri Mamey 5/30  
 Tanya & Joseph Richards 5/29  
 Najeeb & Heba Saadeh 5/15  
 Daniel & Ashley Scholl 5/18  
 Robert & Sarah Smathers 5/10  
 Andre & Sharita Terzian 5/19  
 Patrick & Susan Wilde 5/25

**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 on Sundays or use**

**The new mobile app, RaiseRight by ShopWithScrip, is simply the right way to fundraise. Just make sure to choose "E-Gift Card" and you will have it in your email in less than a minute.**

**Let's start shopping and earning money for your favorite church, St Mark Irvine!**

**Get the app: <https://www.raiseright.com/>**

## **USE THE ENROLLMENT CODE**

**LFA187LD11116**

### **Turn your shopping list into fundraising**

- **Discover new earning opportunities every day**
- **Narrow your search with categories that fit your everyday shopping needs**
- **Easily browse brands offering bonus earnings**
- **Add brands you love to your Favorites for faster shopping**

*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)***

### *Additional Food for Thought*

#### **The Church After COVID-19 – Why Bother Going Back?**

Article adapted from Christianity.com 9/28/20

It's Sunday morning. I sit snuggled up in a warm blanket, relishing the quiet. Before long, the rest of the family will stir, and we'll have a choice to make:

Get ready to go to church? View the service online? Skip it altogether?

Some of these options have emerged in the last year and a half thanks to COVID-19. After months of worship at home with church on zoom or YouTube, rhythms that used to be automatic are no longer a given.

COVID-19 has foisted an even bigger question on all of us, --what is the point of going to church anyway? Can it be done online as well as in person? And if so, then why go back at all?

And obvious answer may present itself: Communion. You may have gone without communion for six months or longer. Likely, you feel the ache of its absence and you are eager to return. Communion is one important

dimension of gathering for Christian worship that streaming cannot replicate. It points towards a broader issue: embodiment.

A question: What is your only comfort in life and death? *"I am not my own, but belong body and soul both in life and death, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ."*(cf. I Cor. 6:19-20) My body belongs to Jesus. By extension, I also belong to his means of grace in the world, the Church. Of course, there is much more to being the Church (and following Jesus) than attending a weekly service, but gathered worship is one significant aspect of being part of the Church. When I choose not to attend, something is missing.

My absence diminishes what Christ can accomplish in my life, while my presence is a tangible means of participation in the Kingdom.

We belong to Jesus *body and soul*. Hence, the importance of *embodied* worship. Something happens when we are physically present together that is simply not possible when we log in online.

Christian worship doesn't just dispense information; rather, it is an encounter with Christ, His Father and the Holy Spirit, where we regularly undergo a ritual cleansing of what we absorb from the world around us. Christian worship doesn't just teach us how to think; it teaches us how to love, and it does so by inviting us into the biblical story and implanting that story in our lives. (You Are What You Love)

With this in mind here are four reasons you should choose to attend Church in person again:

1. Each week my heart is recalibrated in tiny ways that keep me facing Jesus rather than drifting in another direction.
2. Weekly fellowship in the Church Body reminds me that following Jesus means joining God's family.

3. Weekly fellowship in the Church Body enables me to participate in God's work of grace and others.

4. Weekly fellowship in the Church Body is a means of declaring allegiance to the Kingdom of God.

Your presence also affirms the value of corporate worship for all those in attendance. Your smile and your wave and your voice lifted in praise manifest the Spirit's presence to others who have come. This is what it means to be the *image* of God. Our identity as God's image is expressed physically an embodied reminder of the presence and rule of God. We represent the unseen God to one another. You are not your own. You are a member of something bigger than yourself –Christ's body on earth. For those who have been isolated at home and traumatized by the incessant trials of this difficult year, your physical presence may be a lifeline --caring eye contact may lend strength for another week.

On the outside, the Church may not seem like much. It may seem weak. But the Church is a visible witness to the unseen reality of God's Kingdom. Being present each week testifies to this. It acknowledges that God's invisible Kingdom is more substantial and more lasting than the other concrete institutions in our community. It will outlast the Postal Service, local businesses, schools and politicians and their offices. It will outlast COVID-19 and the hurricanes and the wildfires and the ugly inequalities in our world. Your participation ensures this. It testifies to that greater and lasting Kingdom.

I pray that as soon as you are able, you will resume regular and frequent participation in Church worship. There is some risk associated with every activity of life. There will always be things to fear any time we step out of our front doors, but the long term benefits of embodied worship far outweigh the perceived fears. Whether you feel excited about it or not **the Church is your family, and you cannot really be who you are meant to be without it!**

**SAINT MARK ANTIOCHIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH  
17840 SKY PARK CIRCLE  
IRVINE, CA 92614  
MAY 2022 NEWSLETTER**