

O. N. E.

ORTHODOX NEW ENGLAND

Inside this issue:

Chrismation in Meriden 3	
40th Anniversary	4
They Did Not Put Money	
into New Houses	6
Scoops for Troops	7
Baptism in Norwich	8

Diaconal and Catechist Vocations Program Launched

Right: His Grace, Bishop Benedict enters St. Nicholas Church, Salem, for the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, where he tonsured three new readers.



Fr. Mark Roosien

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38). These words are as relevant in twenty-first century New England as they were when Our Lord spoke them in first-century Palestine. A new pro-

gram in the Diocese of New England has taken a big step in responding to Christ’s call for laborers: The newly-launched Diaconal and Catechist Vocations Program of the Diocese of New England.

“Program” continued on page 2

Program from page 1

**The Lord said
to His disciples,
“The harvest is
plentiful, but
the laborers
are few.”
(Matthew 9:37)**

The harvest in New England is plentiful indeed. It is easy get bogged down with the statistics about the rapid secularization of the region, which seem to show that it is “less religious” than the rest of the United States.

That may be true from the arid and empty point of view of mere statistics and demographics. However, behind the numbers are real people living real lives, struggling to find the fulfillment, purpose, and joy that only Christ, the Word of God made flesh, can bring—even if they don’t know it yet.

But if there are no “laborers,” if there is no one to spread His message of joy with wisdom and knowledge, how will the “harvest” be gathered up? This question lies upon the conscience of every Christian in our Diocese. We are all called to be laborers for the Lord’s harvest, every single one of us.

Yet there is also a special calling for certain individuals to take a leading role, people to whom God has given special gifts of wisdom and understanding, strong leadership and effective communication skills, and a

heart for seeking out the poor and those hungry for God.

Recent Diocesan Assemblies have stressed the great need for vocations: for people to heed God’s call in their lives and take on the role of priests, deacons, and catechists and other lay leaders.

In response to this need, diocesan clergy began to make a plan as to what kind of organized vocations program could be implemented. Fr. Mark Roosien (the present author) proposed a comprehensive plan at the October 2023 Assembly in New

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Haven, and after months of planning and organizing, and with hierarchical blessing, the Diaconal and Catechist Vocations Program officially launched in June 2024.

Well over two dozen men and women of all ages and from across the breadth of the Diocese have joined the program as its first cohort. Thanks be to God! Throughout this summer and fall, they have been taking the first of the 7-course

sequence, on Orthodox Spirituality, which it has been my privilege to teach.

Meeting together every other week via Zoom, we have been reading, writing, and discussing writings of Scripture and the great Fathers and teachers of the Orthodox faith: St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Macarius the Great, Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra, and St. Maria Skobtsova, to name a few. The foundational teachings and practices learned in this course will propel the students to the next one in the sequence, on the Old Testament, to be taught by Fr. Constantine Bodien who is a specialist in that field.

Among the students, the sense of excitement and eagerness to serve is palpable and inspiring. By God's grace and the blessing of His Grace Bishop Benedict, many of these students will go on to serve their parish-

There is also a special calling for certain individuals to take a leading role, people to whom God has given special gifts

es and communities as catechists, deacons, and even, with further training, priests.

This is the Program's first cohort among many to come, God willing. If you are interested in potentially joining the Program in the future, or have other questions, please contact me, the Program Director: mroosien@gmail.com.

Fr. Mark Roosien, Rector of Holy Ghost Church, Bridgeport, is the director the new Diaconal and Catechist Vocations Program of the diocese. **ONE** †

Right: Adam Paul Lipinski and Angelika Catherine Federiko were received into the Orthodox Faith through Holy Chrismation at SS. Peter & Paul, Meriden, Conn.



Fr. John Jillions celebrates 40th Anniversary of Ordination

Fr. Constantine Bodien

On Sunday, July 28, 2024, Fr. John Jillions served Liturgy at All Saints Orthodox Church in Hartford as the chief celebrant on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his ordination to the Holy Priesthood. Now retired, during his years of active priestly ministry, he served parishes in Australia, Canada, Greece, England, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (Holy Ghost Church, Bridgeport) as well as having been Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America (2011–2018).

He holds a MDiv and DMin degrees from St. Vladimir's Seminary and a PhD from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2002) in the discipline of New Testament. He has held various academic positions and was Founding Principal of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge, England, where he continues to be a Visiting Professor. He was formerly Associate Professor of Religion and Culture at St. Vladimir's Seminary in the Doctor of Ministry program, and earlier was Associate Professor of Theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Canada. He is the current President of the Orthodox Theological Society in America.

Fr. John is attached to All Saints and remains very active as a substitute priest in the area, serving Saints Peter



and Paul Church in Springfield, Mass., and Saint Nicholas Church in Norwich, Conn. Fr. John also helps facilitate the monthly "Theology Cafe." This is a group within All Saints that meets once a month at the home of Fr. John and Matushka Denise to discuss Orthodox theology as it is encountered in the world around us. It is a very popular group and brings together people of all ages.

In his sermon that day, Fr. John focused on the words of St Paul in the epistle reading, Romans 10:8, quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." The "word of faith" is always a personal word that is lived

out uniquely in each of us, and Fr. John used this occasion to ask himself, “What have I learned in forty years of being a priest?”

1. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). We are messy, flawed human beings, but we carry within us the treasure of Christ’s forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

2. “I am not alone.” His wife and family especially—but also teachers, priests, bishops, friends, and parishioners—are all an integral part his life in Christ.

3. “The priest lives the same life as any other Christian, but in public.” As Fr. Thomas Hopko once said, the entire spiritual life can be summed up in words he learned from his mother at age 7: “Go to church, say your prayers, remember God.”

4. “It is good for us to be here.” Church life at its best, and when we are at our best, is a well-spring of joy and living water.

5. “I know nothing.” There are untapped universes of mystery in nature and in human life, let alone divine life. And how people come to faith—or leave it—is often an inexplicable mystery too.

6. “We are free.” He is more and more convinced that the creative freedom we have as persons made in the image and likeness of God is at the heart of who we are as human beings.

7. “Simplicity.” There’s no need to complicate the basics of living as a Christian. This is St Paul’s message in today’s epistle “The word is near you, on your lips, and in your heart (that is



the word of faith which we preach); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:8-9).

8. “Be yourself.” When I asked my priest from years ago what he had learned, he said “I learned to be comfortable in my own skin.” That’s essential, because if a priest can live that way, he gives permission to others to do the same.

9. “Keep going.” In reading the lives of saints and observing faithful priests and laypeople over the years he was always impressed at their persistence in the face of opposition. The priest’s ministry is what the pastor-writer Eugene Peterson called, “a long obedience in the same direction.”

“Priesthood” continued on page 11

They Did Not Come to Put Money into New Houses and Bank Accounts

Mka. Lydia Westerberg

[Editor's note: Mka. Lydia, currently choir director of Three Saints, Ansonia, Conn., shares this article with the Diocese of New England in order to reflect on the immigrant heritage of Orthodoxy in the Northeast.]

Recently at the Divine Liturgy celebrating the 125th anniversary of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Yonkers, New York, His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, reminded us that our forebears, those immigrants who came to this country at the turn of the twentieth century hoping to find a place—in the words of Jesus Christ Himself—to “lay their heads” were looking for a place to call home. Within the recesses of their whole being they wanted a place where they could simply be “who they are” as Orthodox Christians. They knew their identity.

Many of the founders of this parish, when they were under the authority of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were intimidated, pressured and forced to embrace a language and culture that was not their own and so to renounce their very identity. Not renouncing their identity as Orthodox Christians meant disenfranchisement and sometimes imprisonment.

We all know that under the Hapsburg Empire, Eastern Europeans—Romanians, Slovaks, Czechs, Jews, Russians, Romani, Carpatho-Russians, Galicians—were pressured to become Roman Catholic and to speak Hun-

garian or Austrian in public in their occupied homelands.

As Archbishop Michael pointed out, these immigrants came to America with very little—no English language, no money—leaving other family members behind, never to be seen again. They came with few resources, and the first thing they did was to build churches! They built churches because the Church was their home. They knew within their hearts that the only real and lasting place in this world is the Church established by Jesus Christ—the Orthodox Church. That is where they could be “who they are.”

Today, so many people are confused about their identity. They do not know “who they are.” At the wonderful anniversary reception, I conversed with a seasoned Orthodox Christian educator who has spent many years working with children and young adults, working on curriculum to help students learn their faith and how to live their faith. The word “identity” came up in the conversation, and my friend opined that even with all the instruction, she is not sure the students know their identity.

Our forebears understood and exemplified community in the deepest sense of the word. Their identity was inextricably linked to the community of persons as they saw Christ in their brothers and sisters. They knew their faith, although they were not allowed

“Anniversary” continued on page 11

Scoops for Troops

Vincent Melesko

The Outreach Ministry of St. Alexis Church in Clinton held an Ice Cream Social after Liturgy on Sunday, October 20, to benefit Scoops for Troops. Scoops for Troops is an organization founded by Michael Ahern, a high school freshman who attends Holy Trinity Church in New Britain and saw a need to help wounded military and veterans when he was only 8 years old. In 2022, he was awarded the “Citizen Honors Award, Congressional Medal of Honor” for his commitment to supporting wounded veterans. Michael joined the parishioners of St. Alexis at their Ice Cream Social along with his parents, Rebecca and Scott, and spoke about how the organization began, what they are doing now and how they plan to move forward. The parishioners of



St. Alexis were able to donate \$1000 to Scoops for Troops for Michael to continue in his work benefiting those serving in our military. **ONE +**

Below: Fr. Steven Hosking with Rebecca, Michael & Scott Ahern of Scoops for Troops



14-year-old Baptized at St Nicholas Church, Norwich, Conn.



Fr. John Jillions

Cole Kibbey, 14, discovered the Orthodox Church online early in 2024, and the closest English-language parish to his home happened to be the tiny St. Nicholas community in Norwich, Conn., served on Sundays by a team of retired diocesan clergy: Fr. Mark Sherman, Fr. John Jillions, and Fr. John Bacon.

Cole is the second youngest of seven children, and while his parents aren't Orthodox, they supported his desire to explore his own path to God and took turns bringing him to church and staying with him for the Divine Liturgy.

Cole decided early on that he wanted to join the Church, but he agreed with his parents that he should take some time to be sure he was truly settled on taking this step. For seven months he met almost weekly on Facetime with Fr. John Jillions to learn about the faith. And in August the parish sponsored him to attend the Diocese of New England Youth Rally, which gave him a lively full experience of the Church in the company of many other youth, counselors, clergy and His Grace, Bishop Benedict.

Cole was baptized on Sunday, October 13, taking the name of St. Paisios

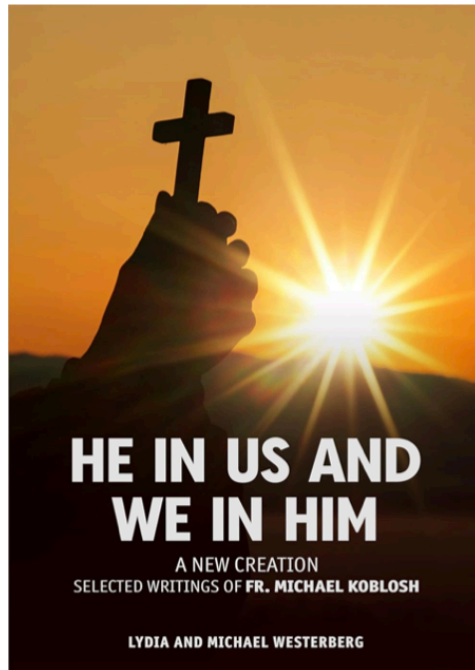


of Mt Athos (1924–1994), whose life had especially impressed him. May God grant the newly illumined Cole

Paisios and his family many blessed years!

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Priesthood from 4

10. “Philippians 4.” The fourth chapter of St Paul’s letter to the Philippians, written from prison, is a summary of all that he has learned and still aspires to learn (Fr. John confessed he is not there yet). “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say Rejoice” (4:4). “Be anxious for nothing” (4:6). And “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

ONE †



Anniversary from 6

to express it fully in the society from which they came. They prayed. They worked. They struggled. They sinned. They repented. They gave of themselves and laid a foundation for all of us. I must say, in my own experience, our forebears were a happy bunch. They did not see themselves as victims. They worked hard, but they also enjoyed singing and dancing and they especially loved the rich liturgy of our Orthodox Church.

We are now the beneficiaries of the deep faith of our forefathers and mothers who never saw themselves as sacrificing their time and talents when they were giving service in the

church. We are grateful to God for the foundation they laid for us.

In the collection of his writings, *He in us and We in Him*, Father Michael Koblosh of blessed memory, a son of Holy Trinity Church in Yonkers, writes: “Today’s celebration remembers and honors their sacrificial labor and the holy lives of many of these immigrants.” These words were not written for the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Holy Trinity Church, but they apply to all the celebrations of the many churches built in America by holy men and women of diverse ethnicities—many of whom intercede on our behalf.

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Upcoming

January

The next issue of Orthodox New England will commemorate the first anniversary of the consecration of His Grace, Benedict, as Bishop of Hartford and New England

Jan 1

First Performance of the Diocesan Choir at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, Holy Transfiguration, New Haven