

The Heavenly Host

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Volume 11, Issue 6

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**In memory of those
who lost their lives in
the World Trade
Center on
September 11, 2001**

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Stewardship by Don Meena

Defining Stewardship

Webster defines Stewardship as "to act as a steward". Steward is defined as "a person put in charge of the affairs of a large household or estate, whose duties include supervision of the kitchen and the servants, management of the kitchen and the servants, management of household accounts." The bible tells us that the church is the House of God. It therefore follows that, as members of the church (household of God), we should act as its stewards. To act as a steward is to perform stewardship.

Brief History of St. Michael

St. Michael Orthodox Church of the San Fernando Valley got its humble beginnings in the late 1960's. Recognizing the need for a neighborhood church located in the fast growing San Fernando Valley, a group of parishioners from St. Nicholas Cathedral, led by Dr. Edward Deeb, set a goal to establish a new mission church in this area. Much work had to be done so committee chairpersons were appointed and tasks identified. As you can imagine the tasks covered many areas including church facilities, finances, membership, church school, religious articles for the altar, altar boys, choir, etc. Every person had one or more tasks to complete in order to successfully establish this new mission church. Before the first Liturgy the membership had grown to over 50 dedicated and faithful families and St. Michael was designated a church not a mission. The first Divine Liturgy was held in this building in February of 1969. The founders sacrificed a lot to achieve their goal of a new church in the San Fernando Valley.

Commitment and Sacrifice

The parishioners knew that they would be expected to make a commitment and to stand by it in order to see St. Michael grow. This commitment included pledging to both the weekly pledge system and the building fund, volunteering and working on committees, joining organizations, supporting all types of activities such as religious services and fund raisers, recruiting new members, and performing physical tasks such as baking, painting, construction, plumbing, to name just a few. Without realizing it we were acting as stewards of God's house using our talents to achieve our goal. Sacrifices were being made but no one minded. The achievement of the goal was worth the sacrifice and the parishioners grew together as one family in God (the church). It was evident early that St. Michael was a church destined for great things. The foun-

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Letter from His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

To all of the Parish Council members of the Western Region:

Christ is in our midst!

I would like to thank all of you for the holy ministry you are performing in your parishes. May God reward you abundantly.

Let me talk to you as children, friends, parishioners and Parish Council members. I would like to take the opportunity to share with you some thoughts on the ministry of the Parish Council in the life of the Church. When I say ministry, I am not saying this to 'spiritualize' an otherwise secular job. A Parish Council member, through the acclamation of the community in which the Holy Spirit resides, has a charisma, a special gift and responsibility to represent and serve the community. This ministry comes forth from God, who is the center of all things. This is why Council meetings are held in the Church, begin and end with prayer and always are conducted with the priest present.

Like organs in a body, each Parish Council member has a special function. All of you have different talents and skills that you bring together to form a single body. The Council meeting is not an arena in which we do battle with others. We do not seek to defeat our enemies and compete with others. Each vital organ of the body works together for a common goal, and so Parish Council members must support one another. The aim is to speak with one voice.

Now, I know that we are not robots, and that all of us have opinions. Sometimes our opinions differ, and when they do we must work harder to deal with each other respectfully and lovingly, otherwise we are no longer serving a holy ministry. Does anyone honestly think that God desires us to engage in political intrigues and manipulations? I will give you the answer: NO.

If you desire to serve God and your community, then leave your personal agenda on the sidewalk outside, don't even bring it onto Church grounds. When you come to Church, your only agenda should be love. And anyone who says, "My way or the highway," does not have love in his heart. Encourage one another, be patient with one another's imperfections, humbly admit mistakes and try to keep things organized so everyone can participate. We don't have time for contests of strength and influence. This is not an arena for old clan grudges or new attacks. It is a place where the vision of the community is woven into a tapestry through your various talents and abilities.

Before you think of finance and business matters, ask yourselves, "Where is God and His Church in what we are doing?" Once you answer this question, you will have peace in your decision-making. If you want God to bless this community, then do your best to avoid unnecessary conflict. Should you have a disagreement with someone, settle it outside the meeting and be reconciled. When you advertise your disagreements, you demoralize the entire community. The people who have entrusted this ministry to you ask themselves: "Is this what we want? More fighting and bickering? The Parish Council can't do anything!" This ministry is holy and an extension of the prayer and worship of the community. The people know this already.

So, I have spoken of how the Parish Council should act, and now I must say a few words about what it does. The responsibility for the material maintenance of the parish falls squarely on the shoulders of the

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St. Michael Church

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September

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Beginning of the Church Year 1						
	2	3	4	5	6	7
Feast of the Birth of the Theotokos 8	7:15 pm-Parish Council Meeting in Conference Room 9	7:30 pm-Ladies Guild Meeting in Ballroom 10			9:30 am-Ladies Prep for Baking 7:00 pm-Vesperal Divine Liturgy 13	8:00 am-Bake Day (Meat Pies) Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross 14
Procession of the Cross Raies-Murr Scholarship Luncheon (St. Nick's) 15						Lay Ministry of the Elderly Training Session 21
	16	17	18	19	20	
9:00 am-Church School Awards Luncheon OPENING OF THE BOOK-STORE 22						
	23	24	25	26	27	28
First day of Church School 29						
	30					

Regular Services

Saturdays:
Great Vespers at 5 pm in the Church.

Sundays:
Orthos at 8:45 am & Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am in the Church.

Confessions are arranged by appointment or prior to services.

Wednesdays and Fridays are observed as *fast days* in all Orthodox churches.

Letter from Bishop JOSEPH, cont.

(Continued from page 2)

Parish Council. No one can individually handle such a responsibility, which is why you need to work together as a team, a family in harmony.

There is a temptation to leave all the problems of the Church to the priest when we cannot reach a consensus on our own. This is wrong. If you leave the priest to stay up nights worrying about whether the bills are going to be paid or if the Council will ever reach a decision on this or that, then you have diverted him from his primary task of caring for the spiritual needs of the community. In the Liturgy, we sing in the Cherubic Hymn about laying aside all earthly cares, and the priest is foremost in having to do this so that he may sanctify himself and others.

If you take the responsibility for the financial well-being of the community, then take it completely. Don't let anyone else worry instead of you. That means fixing problems yourselves. There is no blame if you have done everything humanly possible. But, until you have done everything humanly possible, then the responsibility is still yours. That was why you were elected: not for empty honors, but because people trust you to fix problems. By giving others the gift of peace, you also bless yourselves.

By freeing the priest of these concerns, you can use him according to his purpose. The priest is the voice for the Church's Holy Traditions, and he is an invaluable resource for Parish Councils. He helps remind the Council of its duties and its context. By listening to him, the Council will help the community grow.

By doing your duties as Parish Council members, you prepare your community to participate in the great Church throughout America and the world. This is the role of the Bishop, who links his communities together into a single organism spanning the entire planet. This is why when the Bishop speaks, it is not for himself, but for the Church of Christ. His directions are not open for debate, because they are not just for this parish but all of them. The parish is part of a greater body called the Archdiocese, and if it rebels against the rest of the body, it kills itself and all the other parts of the body. By listening to the Bishop and following his requests without question, you will further the national ministry of the Archdiocese and receive the peace of Christ.

What everyone must realize is that all of the clergy in the parish serve you on Metropolitan PHILIP'S behalf. They are all directly accountable to him, and His Eminence delegates their duties and responsibilities. They are at the parish not as employees but as His Eminence's representatives. We know what they are doing and they keep us informed of their activities. Both the Metropolitan and I appreciate the work of all the priests, deacons, departments and organizations of the Region.

I have faith in Christ, and I believe He will lead you down the right path if you let Him. I also know that your families play an important part in the formula for success in the Parish Council. Your families bear your burdens in a special way, sacrificing their time with you so that you can serve the community. When you are troubled by what goes on in the Parish Council, your distress becomes theirs. So, they too have a special ministry in supporting you with their prayer, patience and perseverance.

Whenever I visit a parish, I am always asked, 'How can we make the parish grow?' Sometimes, they mean in terms of money, other times in terms of attendance. The answer for both is the same: education. Don't think that people are only hungry for cookies and coffee on Sundays. They want to feed on the 'heavenly

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Letter from Bishop JOSEPH, cont.

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bread,' the Word of God. The better the education (that means adults first!), the better the quality of your parish life. The better the quality, the more people you will attract, and the more encouraged they will be to support the Church. Don't you know that quality brings quality?

So, hold your women's meeting and men's groups, but make them educational rather than merely about fundraising or socializing. Focus on learning, and it will take away the dissent and the gossip. Don't look at youth activities as babysitting, but help our young people out by giving them the tools of the faith to overcome life's challenges.

Others have asked me about what I see as the recipe for success for a Parish Council. There are two ingredients to this recipe: keep it concise and speak with one voice. The first ingredient is the hardest for more experienced council members, especially when I tell them to keep the meeting brief. Don't beat people up with endless discussions. Discipline yourselves, and you will be pleasantly surprised. Go home to your families while you are still able to communicate coherently and enjoy their company, rather than collapsing into bed exhausted and confused. Once in a while, gather as a council but don't discuss business. Invite uncontroversial speakers who can help you learn more about the Church or yourselves. Enjoy each other's company and respect one another, and you will have a successful Parish Council.

Next, remember that the Parish Council is not a democratic body, but a symphonic orchestra. That means, you gather to play a single piece of music, not have a group of individual instruments blaring out at once. Endless delays and discussions are futile: what is there to decide once you have heard the Gospel? If you forget God and His message the moment you think of money, you have a problem. Keep Christ in the forefront of your thoughts, and you will have harmony.

I hope you sense both the responsibility and the joy of ministry in the Parish Council. Before I conclude, I must ask you one final question: what is your vision for your parish? What is it that inspires not only you, but the entire community? If you are only trying to preserve what you have, the Scriptures say you will lose everything. You must take risks and make the plunge. For what? For the salvation of all, for the sake of the Gospel. If the message of Jesus Christ isn't in what you are doing in the Parish Council, you are heading towards failure. But, God Himself will be your provider and defender if you resolve to preach Christ to the whole world!

This vision I am asking you about must be a long-term one. It must be something that will endure long into the future, far beyond ourselves. It must inspire those who come after us, lasting after the next election, the one after that, and into the future. It must be a legacy to our great-grand children, one that they will be proud of.

I will close this with a reminder to all of you: our Lord Jesus Christ is here with us every moment. If we are to succeed in anything, it is only through Him. Every moment of every day, He is there. Never forget the fear of God, because it will save you from harm and strengthen your resolve.

God bless all of you for accepting this holy ministry.

Paternally yours,

+Bishop JOSEPH, Auxiliary - Western Region, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

Mortgage Update

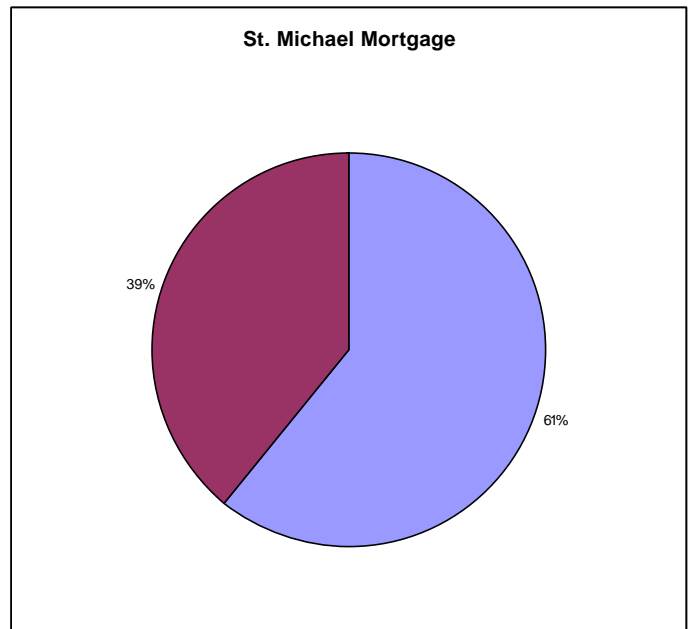
Our original loan was for \$850,000.

We have paid down
\$332,512.70 or 39%.

As of this month we owe
\$517,487.30.



Note: Part of the proceeds from the Golf Tournament have not all been transferred since some of the funds are being used to carry the expenses of the Church. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR PLEDGE INFORMATION IS UP TO DATE.



(Continued from page 1)

ders and parishioners were not content with just a small church facility and hall. They envisioned a master plan that included a new church building, community center and parking structure with membership flourishing. They set about achieving this master plan by purchasing two apartment buildings next to the church. Dedicated parishioners lent money for the purchase of these properties. Fundraisers were held to pay off the church and apartment mortgages and loans. Having completed these, plans for the construction of the Community Center began. This huge undertaking took several years to be realized. Once again the parishioners of St. Michael made commitments and sacrifices to this project. Money was raised, committees appointed, tasks begun. Many problems and obstacles were encountered along the way. The building committee chairman resigned and was replaced, contributions were slow in coming in, the architect was fired, the building plans were reduced in size and scope. But God always showed us the way and people like Jack and Michael Malouf stepped forward to guide this project to a successful completion. You can look at the large plaque in the entryway of the Community Center to see names of those who supported this project. This was an incredible undertaking for the small parish of St. Michael.

Looking back at the growth of St. Michael I can honestly say that not once in its thirty-three year history has it failed to achieve its goal. All of the past stewards (parishioners) of St. Michael have done an excellent job of supervising and managing God's household.

The Future

We can now ask the questions, "Where do we go from here?" and, "Are the parishioners of today any different than those of the past?" St. Michael's master plan has not yet been completed. We still do not have a new church or parking structure. Will parishioners step forward to make the commitment and sacrifices required? God has always guided us in all that we have done and He will continue to do so in the future. Yes, people have changed over the last thirty-three years and our lives have become more complicated. But, I believe that when the need arises and the time comes, God will provide new stewards to guide us and we, the church, will make the necessary commitment and sacrifices to achieve our goal.

May God bless each and every one of you making you stewards of His household.

BEAUTY, MYSTERY & ART

“THE CHRIST” – painted by YVONNE PALESE, RN in memory of September 11, 2001. Available Limited Edition #1 to #500.

ORIGINAL PAINTED VALUED AT \$2,200.00 BY La Scala Gallery of San Diego

Each unframed print at \$220.00 and framed print at \$420.00

Owner receives with LIMITED EDITION, Letter of Authenticity at value of \$500.00 per print (retail unframed).

DEPOSIT REQUESTED

UNFRAMED PRINT: \$220.00

Deposit \$110.00 with Bill of Sale

Balance due on completion of \$110.00 (plus tax on full purchase).

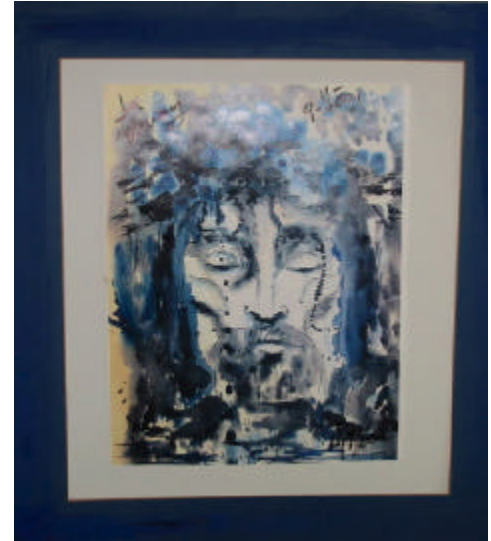
FRAMED PRINT: \$220.00 & cost of frame of \$200.00

Deposit \$210.00 with Bill of Sale

Balance due on completion of \$210.00

St. Michael Church will receive 10% of all unframed LIMITED EDITION sales.

If you are interested in purchasing one of the limited edition prints, please contact Yvonne Palese at (818) 343-7535



From the Ladies Guild

Scrip available each Sunday in the Community Center. A portion of each dollar is donated to our Church and is applied to our mortgage. Shop at your favorite stores and buy item for work, home or school!

You're all invited to sign up for Holy Bread & to host a coffee hour. Please call Leila Abu-Ghazaleh for more information on open dates at (805) 522-4797. The following dates are still available: December 8 for Holy Bread and November 17 & 24 for the Coffee Hour.

Spiritual Bouquets: Donations are offered in memory of the deceased in lieu of flowers. If you wish to participate, please see Jeannette Aboud.

Dates to Remember (please change your calendars since some dates are different): *Church School Awards Luncheon* is Sunday, September 22. *Chili Cook-off and Backgammon Tournament* is Sunday, October 13. *St. Michael Feast Day Coffee Hour* is Sunday, November 10. *Second Annual Christmas Festival* is Saturday, November 23. *Church School Christmas Program* is Sunday, December 15.

Volunteers are needed for a lay visitation ministry team for home-bound elder parishioners. Please see Yvonne Palese (818) 343-7535. Please attend a training session on Saturday, September 21 in Community Center. You can also see Father Timothy or John Khouri for more information.

Christmas Cultural Event: Group rate available at \$20/person for *Messiah Sing-a-long* on Monday, December 16, 2002. Contact Carrie Skaff (818) 501-3477. Bus available if we get 35 reservations!

ST. MICHAEL ANTIOCHIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

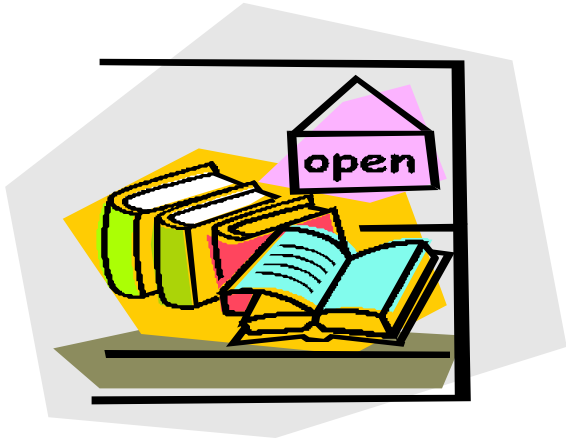
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Book Corner - Book Reviews featuring books currently in the our Bookstore by Gretchen Baclig

THE PRAISES (PSALM148) by Nico Choceli

PRICE \$16.95

Within the last few years, Mr. Choceli has begun to illustrate a series of children's books dealing with biblical themes. In The Praises, each two-page spread has a verse from Psalm 148 on one side and a beautiful drawing on the other. Unlike the cartoon-like sketches found in most children's literature today, these drawings are obviously from the hand of a master.

The book can be enjoyed on two levels. Children will be fascinated by the richly colored pictures of animals and landscapes, while adults will sense the mystical and deeply reverent quality of the work.

I can highly recommend this book to any parent who wants to add a deeper dimension to "bedtime stories." The Bookstore also carries a complete set of Mr. Choceli's other books for children. Note: Book reviews will be submitted by other members of the Church throughout the year.

BOOK SIGNING ANNOUNCEMENT: On September 15, 2002, Conciliar Press will be publishing the first three books in a planned series for children on the Twelve Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church. These books are written in clear, simple verse by Sister Elayne of St. Barbara Monastery (Santa Barbara) and illustrated by Bonnie Gillis of St. Peter Church in San Dimas. On September 29, 2002, the St. Michael Bookstore will celebrate this event by sponsoring a "book signing" following Liturgy. Both Sister Elayne and Bonnie Gillis will be with us to sign all of their books purchased that day.

In the next few days, all St. Michael members will be receiving in the mail a pre-order form to ensure an adequate supply of books on hand for everyone to enjoy. Books make wonderful gifts for our young and old members of the church. Make your gift list now and prepare to send in your order!