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Vessels of Grace in New England



Michael Arida was ordained to the Holy Diaconate on Saturday, July 2, at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Boston. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon presided at the Divine Liturgy. Numerous clergy participated from across New England, notably Dn. Michael's father, dean of the cathedral Father Robert Arida.

Dn. Michael is well regarded across the diocese, having served as traveling subdeacon for His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon of blessed memory. **ONE** +

More photos of the ordination on page 7

Reflections on the All-American Council

V. Rev. Joshua Mosher

The following is an adaptation of my recent letter to SS. Peter & Paul Church, Meriden, Conn. I hope it provides food for thought farther afield as well. —Ed.

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. Many from the Diocese of New England participated, whether as delegates, observers, singers (and directors) in the choir, or children and volunteers in the AAC Youth Program.

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 perhaps unfamiliar term means that our Church has its own primate (Metropolitan Tikhon) and does not depend on a Mother Church (such as

Right: M. Cindy Voytovich of Holy Transfiguration, New Haven, conducts the youth choir at the All-American Council. Several children from the Diocese of New England participated.

Photo: OCA.org



Above: Bishop Alexei of the Diocese of Alaska presides with his clergy at the first Divine Liturgy of the All-American Council.



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 fulness of the Orthodox Faith. This witness is not perfect and there is

pressing need for greater unity and repentance, but it is real.

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

Below: Metropolitan Tikhon joins a rehearsal of the men's choir at the All-American Council. Fr. Steven Voytovich of Holy Transfiguration, New Haven, is also visible on the far right.

Photo: V.Rev. J. Mosher



transparent, and are readily available at oca.org. 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 a 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 reexamined.

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



Above: Bishop Andrei, Auxiliary to the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of the OCA, with children of the Youth Program at the All-American Council. His Grace leads the youth ministry of his diocese, among other duties.

Photo: OCA.org

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 Endow-

Below: Graduates Kristina Yarovinsky, Thomas Crosby, and Ephraim Mosher were celebrated in June at SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church, Meriden, Conn.

Photo: Timur Yarovinsky



ment Fund, in order to provide stable supplementary stipends. Concerned that this worthy effort would receive momentary applause and no sustained attention, a resolution was proposed to set a date for an annual OCA appeal. 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.

Top: Scholarship Awards at Christ the Savior Church, Southbury.

Bottom: Teacher Appreciation at Christ the Savior Church, Southbury.

Photos: Nicholas Yuschak, jr.



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. One surprise treat was the national debut of an arrangement of the Trisagion “Holy God” by Mark Yuschak of Christ the Savior, Southbury. 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.

It set an example for our own communities 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

Bottom: (From left to right) Simon Margitich, Nicholas Haddad, Subdn. Peter Condrick, Fr. John Bacon, Ilia Koulikov & Jan Pecevich (from Pascha 2022, St. Mark of Ephesus, Kingston, Mass.).

Photo: Laura Geigle



challenged them to be ambitious in finding ways to serve the Lord and his Church. He then exclaimed, “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 Mount 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.



Above: Metropolitan Tikhon delivers a charge to newly-ordained Deacon Michael Arida.

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Below: Deacon Michael Arida holds a fan over the Holy Gifts.

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Upcoming

- Sept. 30** **Deadline for next issue of the ONE**
- Sept. 25** **FORCC (Fellowship of Orthodox Churches in Connecticut) Benefit Dinner at St. Dimitrie, Easton, CT**
- Oct. 28-29** **Diocesan Assembly hosted by Holy Trinity, Springfield, VT, and Holy Resurrection, NH**