

KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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Miracles Finding You by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

Let us turn now to an examination of the miracles done by our Lord Jesus Christ. They are a divine gift to humanity. The gift was not given out of necessity, but solely out of good will and mercy. Men should have approached the gift with the greatest reverence and prudence, for the Bestower of the gift declared Himself God, Who became man for their salvation. The gift was His witness, and had an undisputable value.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

In this third issue, we are continuing to present stories of people in the Diocese who converted to the Orthodox Church. As expected, they are varied; but often we can find some similarities which enable us to better understand their journey and assist others in that journey.

This issue looks at two people who experienced what can only be understood as miracles – one desperately in need of physical healing; the other seeking purpose and belonging. Very often we forget the remarkable set of



circumstances which bring a person to not only seek, but actually discover, the Church. These miraculous experiences may only ever happen once in the seeker’s life – highlighting the importance of God’s action in a person’s life as a catalyst on their journey to His holy Church.

We often think of miracles as some “other worldly” set of circumstances, yet we experience them in every single person whom God leads to the doors of our church. This should not surprise us, because, very simply, God is always working in this world and working in our parishes.

It is our challenge to not take these newcomers for granted, but rather to embrace them and enable their own journey. And when God acts and heals them, then we too also must rejoice and say “God is With Us! Understand, all nations, and submit yourselves!”

“The miracles of the Lord had a holy meaning, a holy goal. Although they in themselves were a great benefit in the dispensation of God’s plan, they served as witness and proof of an immensely higher benevolence. In becoming man, the Lord brought to humanity an eternal, spiritual, priceless gift: salvation, healing from sin, resurrection from eternal death.” – St. Ignatius

A Miracle in the Church

By Daniel Beardsley

“That morning, my family was expecting my death, but by the evening my life was returned to me.”

If you had asked me six years ago whether I believed in miracles, I would have answered yes, provided the miracles in question were recorded in the pages of the Bible. As a good Protestant, I knew the Bible to be true but I was closed to the idea that God was still working miracles today. If you posed that same question three years ago, when I was received with my family into the Orthodox Church, I would have dutifully answered that God remains active in the world as is proper Orthodox doctrine. But the answer would have been little more than a simple recitation of theology.

Shortly after my chrismation, I began to fall ill. Slowly at first, I noticed myself feeling more and more fatigued each day. I struggled to remember common words and tasks I had been performing for years. I couldn't recognize my wife's face or the tools of my trade. Over time, my motor functions also fell away. I lost my career in construction, and I spent the following year and a half unable to hold down a job due to my steadily declining health. I finally landed a desk job, with a cocktail of medications and supplements to maintain



myself, but even this grew to be too much for me.

By the end of May 2023, my family was being supported by my wife's part-time income, and I routinely needed to call for help because I had fallen on the floor and couldn't get up. I could no longer form complete sentences or even make the sign of the cross. My faithful wife saw that St. Tikhon's Monastery was hosting the Hawaiian Iveron icon of the Theotokos and having a healing service. She insisted on attending, and half-carried, half-dragged me to the car. We waited in the line for almost two hours, and by the grace of God and the kindness of a passing seminarian, I was able to make my way to the icon. Before the shock of seeing the streaming myrrh had a chance to wear off,

my bishop anointed my head with the sign of our Savior's cross. At that very moment, I was well again.

That morning, I couldn't walk or hardly stand without help. By the evening, I held my cane in one hand and my daughter in the other and danced with her in the living room. That morning, my family was expecting my death, but by the evening my life was returned to me. I've not taken medications or supplements since that day, and my strength has only increased. If you were to ask me today if I believe in miracles, I likely wouldn't know where to begin, because every breath, every step, every moment of my life is a gift from God wrought through His miraculous power and love.

A Miracle of Purpose

By Breanna Moore

“Choose ye this day whom you will serve.” (Joshua 24:15) I remember hearing those words one Sunday morning, and at the age of seven, I walked alone down the aisle to the front of my parents’ childhood church, Magnolia First Baptist Church. I said to my pastor and church community that I would serve the Lord and had no idea the journey that He’d take me on.

By the time I went off to college, Magnolia had experienced many changes in leadership and splits; and in my last two years of college, eight loved ones passed away. As I approached graduation, I questioned my purpose, how much time I had left, and the will of God as a whole. In spite of being frustrated with God, I was accepted into my dream dance program in New York City.

I struggled to find community in an evangelical church. I joined Bible Study groups where I created great friendships, but still felt a growing spiritual hunger that I couldn’t satiate. In March of 2020, the entire world shut down, and I found myself at home, watching church services online with my



family and mourning what seemed like the end of the dance industry that I’d trained for.

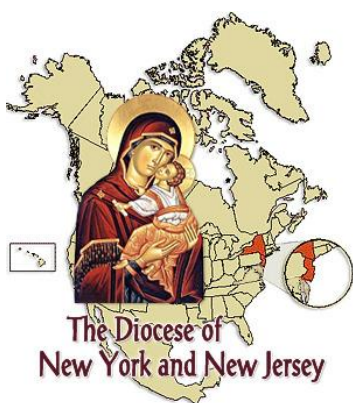
Seeking community, I joined a book club. The first day, in the middle of a 20-minute debate, one of the participants stopped the conversation with one statement: “If you believe Christ to be God, and Mary to be His mother, then you have to believe that she is the Mother of God, unless you don’t think He is God.” I was stunned. I had never heard of Ecumenical Councils or Church Fathers, but after that meeting, I searched the internet to learn more about the history of my faith. I witnessed a sermon that seemed to contradict the council’s profession of Christ’s divine nature. I prayed, spoke with the pastor, and finally, decided to leave the church community. I continued

searching online; and one day, my friend suggested that I’d watched and read enough, and now needed to “come and see” the Orthodox Church.

On my first day, I was early. As I walked through the hallway, I felt I’d been transported from the hustle and bustle of New York to the catacombs of the early Church. I lost track of time as I listened to the Psalms and recognized the depictions of Christ’s life in the iconography. It felt for the first time like the Bible was integrated into worship in a way that elevated it beyond citations, talking points, or rules. The space felt sacred, angelic, and new. As the entire room sang the Lord’s Prayer, I was reminded of Magnolia and the first steps of this now-fulfilled journey.

On January 6, 2024, surrounded by my parish, my mother, and my friends, I was received into the Church with Katherine of Alexandria the Great Martyr as my patron saint. Looking back, I see now how Christ’s hand has led me throughout my life, from my early days at Magnolia, drawing me ever closer to Himself.

“It felt for the first time like the Bible was integrated into worship in a way that elevated it beyond citations, talking points, or rules.”



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Diocese Holds Third Annual Evangelism Conference at St. Gregory the Theologian Church

The Diocese of New York and New Jersey held the third Annual Evangelism School from August 7 to August 9, 2024, at St. Gregory the Theologian Orthodox Church in Wappingers Falls, NY. This initiative is blessed by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, fully funded by the Diocesan Council, and held in conjunction with the Diocesan Commission on Mission and Evangelism.

This year the School focused on parish revitalization, and the participants gathered to spend three intensive days of learning and reflecting on the apostolic work necessary to strengthen the "legacy" parishes. Speakers and presenters were brought in to offer their insights to the attendees, who were gathered from every deanery in the Diocese.

The course work covered the theology and application of parish revitalization, with many of the presenters sharing their own experiences in older parishes and how they were able to revitalize their church communities through various methodologies. Among the instructors were His Eminence, Archbishop Michael; Mitred Archpriest Joseph Lickwar, Chancellor of the Diocese and retired rector of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Jersey City, NJ; Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, Director of the Commission on Mission and Evangelism; Archpriest David Garretson, Rector of SS. Peter and Paul Church in South River, NJ;



and Archpriest Thomas Soroka, Rector of Saint Nicholas Church in McKees Rocks, PA.

The value of these meetings was summed up by one participant who stated, "I had never been able to think critically about the work needed to revitalize our parish. I thought we were going to remain in a static position, but with the success stories and evaluation strategies presented, I have the hope and the tools to begin the conversation in the parish."

Each day began with prayer, continuing with roundtable discussions on various issues facing legacy parishes, and concluding with an open discussion period. Each presenter contributed valuable lessons from his own particular pastoral journey. His Eminence shared his insights into his many years as a parish rector and how he overcame various challenging circumstances. He also shared his direction to parishes as they

confront difficult questions, and he advised the students on how to lead the necessary conversations. Fr. Joseph Lickwar shared stories from his 60 years as a priest and provided a number of examples of challenges and how to navigate them.

The School coincided with the Feast of St. Herman of Alaska, the Wonderworker of North America and one of the greatest inspirations for the apostolic work of the Orthodox Church in America. His Eminence Archbishop Michael presided at the services for the Feast and spoke of the need to tell our stories in order to strengthen the churches.

The Diocese will hold the next Evangelism School in August of 2025 at St. Gregory's Church, as the School continues to rotate clergy and laypersons from each deanery through these inspiring sessions. May God be glorified through our humble efforts!