

**The Orthodox Parish
of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
Lancaster, U.K.**

The Stavronian

a monthly magazine & newsletter published by the 'Holy Cross Synodia'



*Ἰσθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης,
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962).*

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
The Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)*

10 YEARS AGO

The Nativity of Christ in the flesh is the beginning of the New Era of God's Kingdom but it was also a fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets - it was the messianic completion of salvation history, God's plenitude of grace and revelation throughout the Old Covenant come to fulfilment.

Ten years ago this month, **The Stavronian** had its official birthday in its present format. We had printed newsletters going back to the earliest days of 1995 before the online revolution. It is hard to imagine the number of words that have been processed - the articles written, the proof readings that have been made and the editorials that have been formatted.

John Reith said that the mission of the BBC was to educate, inform and entertain. Well I don't know about entertainment, but our mission in the BBC (Beginners of British Christianity) has been to impart life saving truths of our Faith and like the Apostle Paul to keep in contact with those whom he had met and known and who had started Churches. Our Stavronian network has been such an important feature of our extended Parish. I am pleased to report that we keep in contact with one another to this day. They support us in prayer, in their love, in their generous donations and gifts - glory to God!

Throughout this period - I am so grateful to those who have contributed to the Stavronian. I want to make special mention of Dr Theodoros Papadopoulos and Dr Panagiotis Georgopoulos whose constant help and skill have been essential and without whom none of this would have been possible.

May God continue to bless us and our Parish as we approach this most holy

feast of the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"I behold a strange and wonderful mystery: the cave a heaven, the Virgin a cherubic throne, and the manger a noble place in which hath lain Christ the uncontained God. Let us, therefore, praise and magnify Him." --- Megalynarion for the Nativity.

Fr Jonathan



JOY

In October shops were already putting up Christmas decorations and articles for sale. A bookshop assistant spoke of the dreaded C word, Christmas.

Joy cannot be bought and sold at Christmas, nor indeed as a commodity at any time. Joy will never bring dread because joy is a gift of God, present throughout the Scriptures. Cruden's invaluable concordance lists even more references to joy in the Old Testament than in the new. The whole of creation is exhorted: "*Sing for joy, O heavens*" [Isaiah 49:13](#). Creation responds "*The valleys*

sing and shout together for joy.” Psalm 65:13.

Joy is a gift for all people as the angels sang at the Nativity. All of life can be an occasion for joy. Everyday activities like eating and drinking are included. *“Go, eat your bread with enjoyment and drink your wine with a merry heart.”* Ecclesiastes 9:7. Fellowship brings joy. *“I long to see you that I may be filled with joy.”* 2 Timothy 1:4.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Christ wishes to share His joy with us: *“these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”* John 15:11.

Joy can be present in a time of great suffering. A Romanian priest, Fr Nicolae Steinhardt, was baptised in prison, in a moment seized when the guards were busy. He wrote of his baptism, while still remaining in prison. *“I find myself assaulted, second after second, by ever stronger attacks of joy.”*

However, there are those of us, of whom I am one, who are not consistently joyful in all things. The Risen Christ shows Himself to be patient as He seeks to restore joy. In Luke 24, Jesus appeared standing among the disciples and supposed that they saw a spirit. Verse 37. Christ remained patient, as He does with us, and showed Himself to be the Incarnate Christ Who was human as well as Divine by eating their food. He still had to be patient and explain the scriptures, saying He would give them the promise of the Father. It was only then *“they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”* Verse 52. Christ comforts us, is patient and will hear the prayer *“Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation”* Psalm 51:12.

Gladys Bland
Cambridge



JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY: Interview with Brian Noel, Orthodox convert from USA

1. *First of all, I would like you to talk a little bit about yourself and about your conversion to Orthodoxy, so that our readers discover your personality.*

I am currently a 30 year old working professional. I am a counselor. I am not married nor do I have any children. I was born and baptized and confirmed as Roman Catholic. My parents raised me with those values. Throughout my short life thus far, I have always sought to increase my understanding of the Christian Faith. Even when I was a child I enjoyed bible stories or religious studies. I even pretended to say mass as a kid. I went to a Catholic grade school but I did not attend a Catholic High School. I remember getting upset with my parents for not sending me to a catholic school. Instead I attended a public high school. I understand why my parents did it. They wanted me to have a better education and greater opportunities. So I continued with my religious education with my parish's youth group. I was a pretty active member. For me, it was like I couldn't get enough theology. I what I realize now is that I was really searching for the academic or scholastic part of theology and not what I have found in Orthodoxy to be the true search for God. It is said a theologian is one who prays. I was more one who studied. Yes I prayed and tried to do so on a regular basis. I faced many challenges to my faith practice from my peers.

After high school, I went to catholic college seminary for 3 years. I eventually became ill in my Junior year of college and did not return to seminary for my fourth year but went to the university side of the college. The campus was split

into two sections. One for the seminarians and one for the college students. Both sides interacted fairly often. Once treated as a brother with the seminarians, I now felt rejected by them. I had one friend remain who was a seminarian. All my other friends stopped talking to me. This was extremely hard to deal with. But ultimately this was the beginning of my conversion.

Ever since 2008 when I left the seminary, I struggled with going to church on Sundays. Something in me felt off, like I didn't belong. I would regularly go to spiritual direction but it didn't seem to help. I was always very nervous and anxious when going back to the parish of my teenage years, even when simply visiting.

After 3 years of grad school I returned to live with my parents in June 2013. I continued to feel this same way of not belonging and of anxiety of going to church. So, I decided to branch out a bit. Not much, at that time I still believed that the catholic church was the true church. I had learned about eastern catholics or byzantine catholics when in seminary. There was a parish in Harrisburg, PA that I began attending. Granted it was about an hour and a half away for me, but I knew I needed to stay close to God.

This parish was instrumental in my conversion to Orthodoxy. At first I was lost in the services as I only attended a few previously, but then I became a bit more aware of what was going on in the services. I eventually was an altar server though I didn't know too when what was going on. Still really fresh with the whole divine liturgy. But the music was angelic and the temple beautiful. I did start to feel home and comfortable attending church again. But maybe 6 months later I stopped attending that parish and became a catechumen in the Orthodox Church.

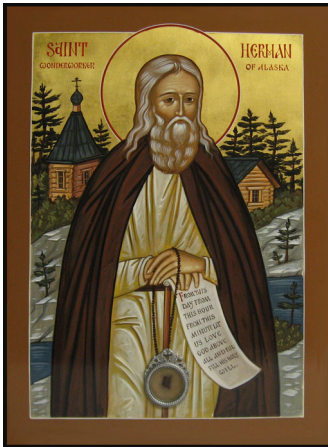
In my search for God, I went out seeking all the knowledge that I could in

terms of the eastern Christian spirituality. All I really could find was Orthodox books. I listened to podcasts. Fr. Hopko of blessed memory, was by far my favorite at the time. He had a special on the Divine Liturgy. So I was listening and realized my catholic parish was not following those norms of the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church. I also began to realize that the byzantine catholic churches weren't following true Orthodox teaching. There was a disconnect between catholic theology and Orthodox theology. The byzantine catholics were trying to straddle both sides but the theologies have irreconcilable differences.

What ultimately drew me to an Orthodox Church was vespers. In my hunger to know more of the eastern Christian life and spirituality, I wanted to enter into the full liturgical life of the church. At the time, the parish I was attending did not have vespers. So I started to go to Holy Apostles Orthodox Mission in Mechanicsburg, PA for vespers. I was introduced there to several people who are now my close friends. In talking to them and learning about the Orthodox Church, I slowly began to question the teachings of the catholic church.

I can remember the moment very well. It was Holy week of 2014. This year Pascha and easter were on the same day. I spent a few services at Holy Apostles during the Holy Week again because the parish I was at did not have them. I came to Holy Saturday Divine Liturgy. This was the first Divine Liturgy I attended at an Orthodox Church. There were differences that I noticed. In the end, I did not go to the Paschal services with Holy Apostles that year. I was of the mind set that since I'm catholic, I should attend a catholic church for easter. I went to the parish next morning as that parish did not celebrate easter at midnight. Throughout the entire liturgy I felt like I didn't belong

again. I kept having the same thought, “I don’t believe the same things as this parish anymore.” The following Sunday, I went to Holy Apostles for Divine Liturgy. About a month later, I was a catechumen in the Orthodox Church.



2. What is the most important change in your life since you have become Orthodox?

That is difficult to say. Much has really changed in my life since I began my journey to Orthodoxy. I think that maybe the most important change would be how I look at the world. I don’t see the world as evil necessarily or that its very nature is evil, but that as Orthodox Christians we are called to sanctify the world. In everything we do we are to glorify God and bring all of creation back to Him through our prayers, sacrifice, and practice of the True Faith.

3. Do you think that the Orthodox Church could be considered a some kind of hospital for wounded souls?

I think that the Church is exactly that, a hospital. It is especially clear when we look at the theology of ancestral sin and how the Church sees sin. The Church sees

it as sickness. We are hurt in body and soul when we sin. The only healing available for us is Christ Himself. That is why we have the Mysteries. Christ is the Divine Physician. We all need healing from our passions and sins.

4. Please describe in some words how does the Orthodox life in the US look like.

I’m not sure if I can adequately describe it. I think it looks much like it does in other countries; however, we do not get off on the feast days as we do for holidays. This makes it much harder to celebrate the feasts as we should. I think there is possibly some hardship in America for the simple fact that the American culture is opposed in many ways to the Orthodox life. This is a major challenge but not one that cannot be overcome. I know in my home parish, it is a very close knit group and many of the parishioners give much of what they have for the parish and each other and will when they are able to do so celebrate the feasts as best as they can and follow the fasts as well. I think the hardest thing for Orthodox in America is simply lack of understanding from those looking in. There is very much a missionary aspect to America still going on since the time of first Orthodox to come to North America. I think in some countries there is more understanding of the Faith and acceptance of the practices. But I also believe this is quickly diminishing as the a secular minded culture continues to take over.

5. Do you think that American Orthodoxy could flourish in the future and if so, how?

I’m not too sure how to answer this. I do believe that American Orthodoxy can flourish just as it has in other countries especially what are referred to as the old countries. But time is most definitely

needed. Hard work is an absolute imperative. I think the only way that Orthodoxy will flourish in America is if we truly practice the Faith to the best of our ability and live as Christ taught us through the holy apostles. We must not waver or dilute the teachings of the Church. I think of St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside, California as what it could be like. I think they give us a good example.

6. Given that you are a convert to Orthodoxy how can Orthodoxy in your opinion become a way of living? Not least, which would be your testimony for the heterodox individuals who intend to explore more the orthodox horizon?

I do not know if it can become a way of living, but is by its very nature a way of living. Similar to what I've been saying, our every action is to be a holy action, one that brings us and others and all of creation closer to God. Granted this does not happen the instance of baptism or chrismation. I think in order to live the Orthodox Faith, we must begin at the very bottom. We must start out with those things which we are able to do. If that means fasting from meat and dairy, we start there. If it means that we begin a prayer life however simple under the direction of a spiritual father, we start there. Slowly and in time do we become fully immersed in the Faith and Orthodox way of life. We do this until we go the dread judgement seat of Christ. And even there all we can do is cry out, "Lord have mercy".

7. Which would be your main argument for saying that the entire truth can be found only in the Orthodox Church?

This is what has led me to the True Faith. It is the faith that has kept the teachings of Christ handed down through the

apostles and preserved by the Fathers and Mothers of the Church. I can only speak from my experience. For me, Church history was vital to my conversion. It is clear throughout history that all the other churches: protestant, catholic, oriental orthodox, have in some way diverted from what was taught by the apostles and upheld by the Fathers and Mothers of the Church. When I studied Church history, I saw these other communities break away from the Orthodox Faith. What the nail in the coffin was for me was the addition in the west to the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Ecumenical Council clearly stated that no should change the Creed. Unfortunately the west did that. I would say the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and True Church is Orthodoxy because it has remained unaltered in its doctrine.

8. In your opinion which Orthodox thinkers or representatives have contributed most to the evolution of Orthodoxy in the US?

I can really only name a few: Fr. Thomas Hopko and Fr. Schmemmen of blessed memory. I cannot say that I know much more than that. I do believe that Fr. Josiah Trennam has had a big influence and may have an even bigger influence in the future.

Interview given to Tudor Petcu, Romania

Tudor Petcu is a writer and a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest. Part of his work focuses on the evolution of Orthodox spirituality in the West. This article is part of his new book of interviews with Western converts to Orthodoxy, to be published in the near future.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CELTIC FATHERS

From the life of St Kevin of Glendalough, Ireland: Once, when Saint Kevin was praying in his cave at Glendalough having his arms stretched in the shape of the cross, a bird thought that his hand was a branch and perched on the palm of the saint to incubate her eggs. The saint waited completely still until the little birds came out of their eggs.

*Christos Vasilopoulos
Kozani, Greece*

WHAT IS A READER?

In-mid October a gathering of 20 Readers from the Anglican church from Lancashire took place at the parish of Holy and Living Cross at Lancaster. The goal was to introduce them to the office of Reader in the Orthodox Church. The evening began with Vespers, was followed by a presentation by Fr Jonathan and a question and answer session, and was concluded with a rich tea buffet.

For further information on what is the ministry of a Reader in the Orthodox church please follow the article written by Kleio Kechagia on her blog [here](#).

PARISH NEWS

On Nov. 18th, Barnabas Dickinson was presented with the Chevalier (Knight) medal of the [National Order of the Legion of Honour of France](#) for his participation in the Normandy landings during World War II. The ceremony took place at Chorley Town Hall and was filmed by ITV

(see short video [here](#)). Fr Jonathan and parishioners attended this wonderful ceremony and celebrated with our beloved Barnabas this major honour.



At last we have in place on our Iconostasis above the Royal Doors the Icon of the Mystical Supper donated by Fr Eustathios Sabbides from Cyprus. I am sure you will agree it is most beautiful (see following photo). We thank the Iconographer, also named Eustathios, for this most wonderful gift to our Temple and to Tony Plater for making the frame, fittings and installation of the icon.



We would also like to thank Kleio Kechagia for the kind gift of the Bishop's Cathedra (Throne), which is placed by the choir in the church. We would also like to thank Catherine-Anne Hemmings for the donation of the toys and toy box for our crèche, and Anastasios Apostolidis who provided candles and charcoal for the church. May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ give the reward!



We congratulate Marta and Sean Radford on the birth of their baby-boy Joshua. May the Lord give the blessing!

OLD STAVRONIAN CORNER

We are so very grateful to those who remember us in their prayers and show their love as generous benefactors of our Parish. We would like to thank Thomas

Tziortziotis from London, who sent candles for the church.

Fr Jonathan received great news from Old Stavronian, Lauren Rucker Pulley, from Midlothian, Virginia, USA, as her husband deacon Patrick is going to be ordained a priest on Dec. 24th by Bishop Alexander of Dallas (OCA). Axios!

Fr Jonathan also received news from Old Stavronian Alla Ganshyna, from Lansing, Michigan, USA. Her email follows:

Dear Father Jonathan,

Thank you for sending me your interview "[Finding the Faith of Joseph of Arimathea](#)" and your talk "[My conversion to Orthodoxy](#)".

There is a small bookstore in Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Lansing, where we bought the book "A Faith Fullfield" by Fr. Michael Harper. There was writing about Lancaster, UK, and about you. We gave it as a present to our friend, who is choir director in Saint Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Ithaca, NY; he and his wife and daughter were converted to Orthodoxy too. They visited us in middle of October, our kids are best friends. We moved very far away from NY (10 hours driving by car), but they visited second time to us to support children's and our friendship.

We miss you and we pray for you,
Alla, Andrei, Masha

P.S.: Please, send best wishes to the Lancaster Orthodox Community from us.

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

4th Dec: Great Martyr Barbara

6th Dec: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

9th Dec: The conception of the Most-Holy Theotokos by the Righteous Anna

11th Dec: Hieromartyr Metropolitan Seraphim (Chichagov)

12th Dec: St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

13th Dec: St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America

25th Dec: The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

27th Dec: Protomartyr Stephen
For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org

Services at St Martin's in December*

Sat. 3 rd	13:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 4 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 10 th	13:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers
Sun. 11 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 17 th	13:00	6 th Hour and Memorial
Sun. 18 th	10:00	Hours and Holy Liturgy
Sat. 24 th	14:00	Great Vespers of the Nativity of Christ
	18:30	Liturgy of St Basil of the Nativity of Christ in the Flesh, followed by Carols and breaking-of-the-fast Parish meal
Sun. 25 th	-	No Liturgy on Christmas Day
Sat. 31 st	13:00	Memorial, Confessions, Synaxarion and Great Vespers

*Help setting up the church is greatly appreciated and starts from 9.30 a.m.

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
- St. George Karslides -



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The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, [Constiinta Ortodoxa](#), in English, [Orthodox city hermit](#), and in Greek, [Orthodoxy rainbow](#).

