No. 229

December 2025

The Orthodox Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, Lancaster, UK

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter publicised by the Holy Cross Synodia

Ἐνθρονος 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.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.

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

ARCHDIOCESE RETREAT 2025

This year I was blessed to attend the first and a half day of the Archdiocese Retreat 2025 at Othona Community, Bradwell-on-Sea. It was a blessed time of fellowship reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones. It was also a very different retreat from all previous ones I had attended in the past.

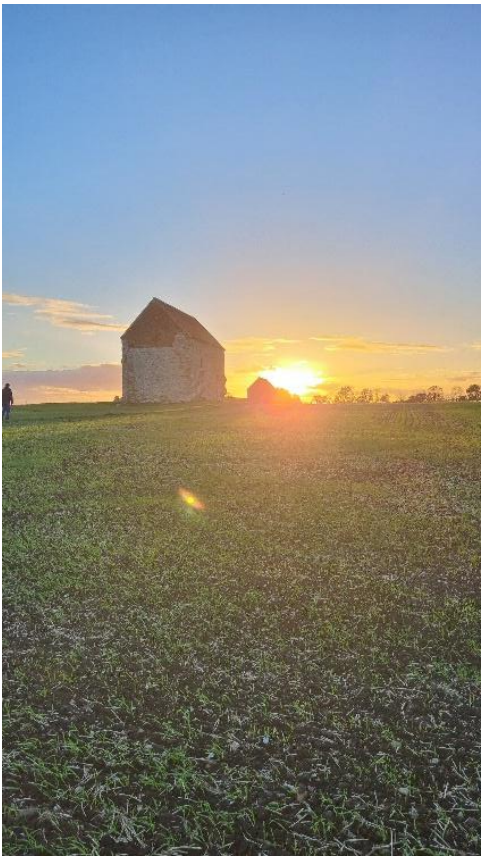
To begin with, ⅔ of the approximately 60 attendees were converts, and the majority of them between 20 to 30 years old; the rest, mostly young families with their babies and young children. These two parameters, young age and converts, had a dramatic impact on all activities. The energy level and zeal remained on peak level throughout the retreat! The volunteers' and organiser's zeal and joy were also just amazing! So much hard work offered in pure love! The church also where all church services were celebrated was also unique in the sense that it was the oldest possibly Celtic church in the UK, blessed by Saint Cedd in 660 A.D. This time HE Sayenda SILOUAN blessed the retreat with his presence all three days.

The Retreat officially began with Vespers at 5:30 PM, and following Vespers celebrated by Fr Alexander Haig, we gathered for a delicious dinner and time of fellowship. Afterwards, another novel experience for me followed, an icebreaker activity: building a bridge using wooden sticks and craft materials, designed to carry the most weight. We were divided into groups according to age, including three children's groups (ages 3–8, 8–12, and 13–16), and the creative competition sparked incredible laughter, joy, collaboration, and new friendships. All bridges were impressive, especially the winner. Father Jonathan's bridge sadly collapsed in the end, but Hadi's group built such a solid bridge that young boys could climb on it!

Then, the Small Compline Service was read by the teens' group. The evening concluded with free time for fellowship. In a moment of shared joy, everyone came together to celebrate the birthday of our Chaplain, Fr Alexander Haig Jr., and the name day of Fr Dmitry Ismagilov (Feast of St Demetrios, celebrated on Sunday).

The second day of the Archdiocese Retreat, Saturday, 25 October, began early at 7:00 AM with the Daily Matins in the same ancient church. Then, after breakfast, the first adult talk of the day, titled "The Church as Our Spiritual Family," was given by Archimandrite Philip Hall. It was such an impressive talk that so many asked for a copy to reflect further. After the talk, Fr Philip invited us to discuss a series of challenging questions in our teams, and the input offered was truly precious. Throughout the daily activities, we also had the opportunity to go for confession with the priests present. All the Fathers were so kind and helpful to everyone! At the same time, three parallel talks were held for the children and youth. Afterwards, adults and children came together for a lively game of Capture the Flag on the lawn outside the main building. Those who preferred a gentler pace enjoyed exploring the nearby coastal paths. We chose an even gentler pace and stayed indoors … 🙄

Following lunch, the second adult talk of the day, titled "Raising Children in the Orthodox Faith," was delivered by Fr Jonathan Hemmings. Like Fr Philip earlier, Fr Jonathan led an interactive session, with teams discussing questions and sharing their reflections. Meanwhile, the children's programme continued with age-appropriate talks, and then, it was time to leave and Father Dmitri drove us to Euston train station to get a train for Lancaster.



LOVE LETTER

I am a very simple person and my mind refuses to grasp most theological concepts which involve any degree of complexity. Any abstract idea has to be translated into a common everyday occurrence for me to begin to comprehend. I am thus limited in the spiritual literature I can read with benefit and even in the prayers I can wholeheartedly say.

The Nicene creed has been one of the prayers I have found difficult for years. I dragged my feet through it on a daily basis during morning and sometimes evening prayers. I am ashamed to say, I sometimes skipped it altogether since I felt I had already covered that ground after years of reciting it daily and that I had finally gained clarity as to what exactly I believed in. I marched my way through it during the Holy Liturgy in unison with everyone else, sometimes not paying attention to the words I was declaring.

I sometimes had nightmares that I will be asked to recite it by myself and I would lose my thread half way through or find I couldn't even complete the first line after all these years of daily reciting. This brought back memories of being caned in school or being covered in shame at the end-of-year show because I could never learn anything by heart and recite it in front of an audience.

Over the last couple of years, things gradually began to change. I became increasingly aware of the importance of the Creed both as an expression in the simplest terms of the most unfathomably deep mysteries and of the importance of the unity of faith in a world marked by division and fragmentation. I found reassurance in knowing exactly what I believed in and found the double personal pledge and collective profession of faith comforting. As my spiritual father says, "everything you need to know is in the Creed". For 1700 years, Christian Orthodox have been pronouncing exactly the same unaltered words which represent the quintessence of their faith. What wonderful strength there is in this! It has been a defence against all heresies and distortions of our faith from its very creation in 325 at the Council of Nicea.

The growing awareness of the weight these words bear, fuelled my enthusiasm. I started thinking: "Lord, I do believe with all my heart in all these teachings of the Church. I hold these truths dear". In the words of the Creed, I began to confess my faith to the world with deliberation and to make my solemn pledge to God.

Then, one morning, everything changed out of the blue. I read the familiar words with different eyes. I wasn't the one talking to God any longer, He was talking to me.

In the staunch lines:

"I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God […]

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life",

I heard the gentle whisper of the loving Father.

I had become the listener, the recipient, the

receiver. The Creed stopped being just a list of statements of fact, a summary of my beliefs, but took on the form of a love letter from God to His creation. I read in the condensed words, the depth and breath of God's love for man, for me.

I was moved to the core of my being by a Love so great that it called me from nothingness into being and placed me in a world filled with beauty, visible and invisible. I failed my Father through ingratitude and pride and every imaginable sin. Yet, despite it all, He came down "for us men and for our salvation" and still out of love for me "became man" and more unthinkable than everything else, "was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried". What more could I possibly ask for as a proof of His unfailing commitment? But he bestows more gifts on me, unworthy that I am: the promise of eternal life "He shall come again" and "His kingdom shall have no end". And even as I await, filled with hope, gratitude and awe for His second coming, He gives me the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to guide me and help me along the thorny path of life. He also gives me the Word of the prophets to guide me, a home and shelter in His Church, baptism to cleanse me and hope in life eternal to sustain me.

So far from dragging my feet, I now skip joyfully along the words of the Creed, as I listen to all the miraculous wonders wrought out for me by my Lord. My heart is filled with gratitude and joy at the gifts bestowed on me, the promises to come and the Love which shines through them all.

HERE AND NOW

"One of the main tragedies of the Fall is that we can no longer be fully present in the moment in which we live." (Kallistos Ware)

I have lived my adult life surrounded by children, my own, my friends' and those I look after for my job. The more time I spend with children, the more baffled and enchanted I find myself.

This week, I collected from school a ten-year-old and I asked her about her day at school and her weekend, always filled with fun activities. She gave me usual "It was fine" with absolutely no detail and immediately busied herself with kicking the piles of leaves on the pavement. This brought back a wave of memories with the word "fine" reverberating over 20 years of school collections. Children never want to talk about their day at school or about what happened yesterday, for that matter, because yesterday is done and dusted. School is over and the piles of rustling autumn leaves are so inviting here and now. Children do not dwell in the past; they live in the here and now almost exclusively. Yesterday, with its fun and mishaps is left behind unceremoniously and tomorrow will take care of itself.

As adults, we are constantly trying to teach our children lessons about reflecting on the past, analysing its mistakes and dwelling on the good things, we try to instil in our children an understanding of consequences by constantly correcting their behaviour with past examples and warnings about future consequences. They just don't get it because "here and now" is so captivating and fills their entire being so that they have no room for regrets, nostalgia or wishes and future projections. Rather than correcting them, I am daily more inclined to say we should learn from them the joy of living in the moment. We should shed off the cloak of worries and anxieties about the future, as well as lay down the burden of past regrets and just kick those piles of leaves.

I have often wondered if this very light way of being is also a consequence of the fact that children bear no grudges, have no resentments. Every moment is a completely new start. How often, a child gets shouted at by a grown up and the child, absolutely distraught at the time, has forgotten all about her pain minutes later and is able to give the grown up an unreserved hug, while the adult is still dwelling on the child's misdemeanour days later.

I reflected on this because recently, my friend asked me "How can we live in the present moment?" The only answer I could find is "Watch children and learn from them."

"We can encounter God only in the present moment, whenever we live in the past or in the future, we place ourselves beyond His reach." (Archimandrite Meletios Webb)

Alexandra McCafferty

THE OBEDIENCE OF PILGRIMAGE

Here I am, trying to write a paper on obedience and its benefits, while the entire time, I am wanting to give up and not be obedient. The worst thing for me now when it comes to obedience, especially since I have seen the tremendous benefits and fruits, is that I still don't want to be obedient when it is asked of me to do something I don't want to do! "This is stupid" is what runs through my head, yet even through the flood of temptations, I know that if I can pull together a passable article, that was done with at least a little effort, from my heart, that my obedience will benefit my soul in one way or another, whether seen or unseen. Perhaps I will be freed from a passion, or rewarded in some way.

How can I possibly have such hope of a reward from a minor form of obedience as writing a single paper? It is simple, I have lived the heavenly bounty the Lord graciously pours out for even the smallest amount of effort in the right direction. It boggles my mind how little effort is needed for God to move.

Pilgrimage has been a challenge these last three months of my crash course into "foreign" Orthodoxy. You would think a pilgrimage is the same as a vacation! This has hardly been the case. There I was, burnt out, disheartened and immensely embarrassed. With my prayer rope in my pocket I walked to the Church in the bitter cold of the morning. I hardly noticed the cold, how could I feel the pain of it when I was cloaked in shame?

"One more service and I can leave" I told myself.

I tried my best to keep a noble posture befitting of a man, though my soul within me could have passed beneath the door.

It was just the night before that I came to the terrible realization that I had unintentionally overstayed my welcome at the monastery, simply by a misunderstanding and poor communication on my part. Yet, worst of all, it was not only that I overstayed my welcome at a monastery… but at a women's monastery!

After this experience I half-heartedly "attempted" to stay at other monasteries, as was the persistent advice of my spiritual Father.

It finally came to a disobedient climax. I was stranded. No hotels were open, the hostels were not keen on having me stay with them and the monastery doors locked tight! There I was in my rental car with only a bag of clothes and Icons. I tucked my car away in a relatively "Sketchy" parking lot outside of the monastery. I flopped down my back seat and laid my dirty and clean laundry down as my bedding and prepared to sleep the night away. I did it in good spirits, but the night was tremendously uncomfortable. I was too large, the car too small, and the night too cold. Between the three of us, we were happy to end the night together early and run to the relief of the liturgy.

I realized the error of my ways, repented and full heartedly made up my mind to seek the hospitality of a monastery for the following days of my pilgrimage.

To my surprise I was accepted into a tiny burned down monastery with only a monk or two that I saw. Although, to the outside perspective this monastery was not worth going to, the two days I spent there proved to be of unimaginable value, both spiritually and physically that continue to benefit me to this very day.

SPECIAL NOTE ON THE NATIVITY FAST

On November 15, we begin, with God's help, the forty-day Nativity Fast in preparation for the great feast of the Nativity of Christ on December 25. Throughout this period, we abstain from meat, poultry, eggs and dairy. According to the Patriarchate of Antioch, it is not necessary to fast from oil, but people may choose to do so. Please consult your spiritual father for guidance. From November 15 -- December 11, fish, wine and oil are allowed every day, except Wednesdays and Fridays. But fish, wine and oil are allowed on November 21, the Entrance of the Theotokos, regardless on which day of the week it falls. From December 12-24, we observe a strict fast with *katalysis* (relaxation) for wine and oil on Saturdays and Sundays, on commemorations of vigilrank and intermediate-rank saints such as Nicholas and Ignatius, and for church patronal saints.

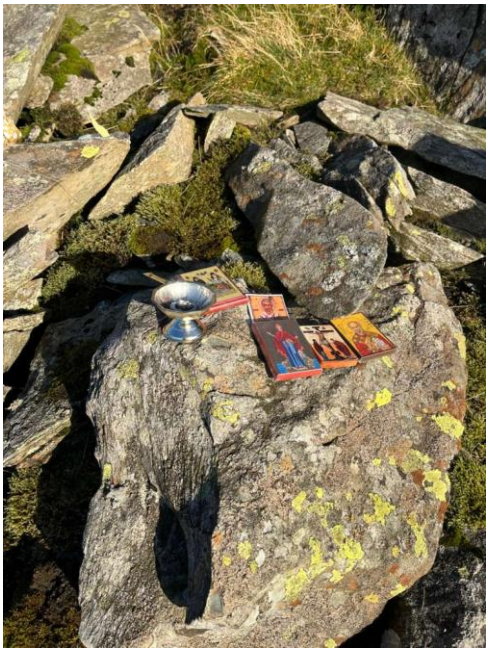
PARISH NEWS

Climb…

Three of our faithful brothers climbing the Fairfield Horseshoe on a bright winter's day in November.

> *I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.*

Jacob, Nicodemus and Moses said the Akathist *Glory to God for all things* at the summit.



Introducing '*The Library table*'

> *"When you immerse your mind and heart in spiritual books, you will always be filled, for spiritual reading gives you a foundation in God."* (St. John Chrysostom)

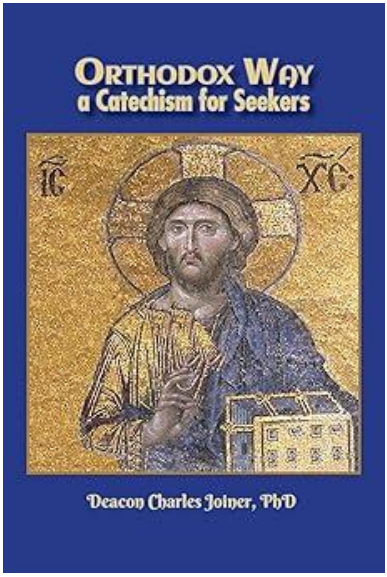
The library table will be available at church at least once a month. Everyone is welcome to borrow books and return them when they are finished. There are no strict deadlines — you can take your time. As St. Theophan the Recluse reminds us: "*You should read quite slowly. Stop reading when the soul no longer wants to nourish itself with reading — that means it is full*."

At the library table, you'll find:

- Books on Orthodox subjects available to borrow.
- Free bookmarks to take home and keep.
- Have a book in mind? Suggest it for our collection by posting a slip into the suggestion box.

We gratefully accept book donations on Orthodox subjects if they are in good condition. If you wish to donate a book outside the Orthodox tradition, please speak with Father Jonathan for a blessing first.

Every month, we will purchase at least one new book to add to the collection. You will find a brief review of each new book in *The Stavronian* newsletter.



The first book purchased for the library in November is *Orthodox Way, a Catechism for Seekers* by Deacon Charles Joiner, who also wrote the *Ten Point Program for Orthodox Life* pamphlet. This book is a fuller version of the pamphlet, offering an accessible guide to the Orthodox faith and is suitable for catechumens and for lifelong Orthodox Christians who want to deepen their understanding.

We warmly invite everyone to share reviews of books that have inspired or supported them for inclusion in *The Stavronian*. Your experience could inspire others too.

You can also search the online Holy Cross library catalogue.

Summary of church council meeting no. 14

Held at the Church of St. Martin of Tours, Westgate, LA4 4UZ

Sunday, 2nd November 2025

The meeting which was scheduled for October was delayed and instead held on 2nd November. There will be a second meeting towards the end of the month to finalise preparation for the St.

Nicholas' Fayre.

A report from the treasurer, Alexandra, revealed that income for the previous month had been steady, with the only expense being the rent for the building.

The council then discussed further preparations for the St. Nicholas' Fayre, going over a table of stalls and further planning the logistics and layout which will work best with what is shaping up to be a well-stocked event with the number of stalls already exceeding last year. As parents may already be aware, the children are being asked to colour in the posters for the Fayre ahead of distribution. Remember, it will be Saturday, 6th December, 11:00 AM until 3:00 PM. Please invite friends and family who may not have heard yet!

The date of the Christmas Liturgy was provisionally agreed for the night of Christmas Eve. Please await further details.

Online donations

Our Orthodox Community of the Holy and Life Giving Cross has been blessed to have a building for a Temple that serves the needs of the Orthodox Christians in the Lancaster area. To this end, we are making **an appeal to help raise funds to cover the rent and other needs of the Church** on a permanent basis. Our monthly expenditure also includes purchasing food, drinks, disposable cutlery and dishware, paying insurance, and other costs. Hence, regular on-line giving to the Church, instead of cash donations on the plate, would help the parish to budget better and plan for the future.

If you would like to give regularly, the details are provided below:

Name: The Orthodox Church of Holy Cross
Bank: Lloyds Bank Plc
Sort Code: 30-96-26
Account Number: 80662168

IBAN: GB23LOYD30962680662168
BIC/SWIFT: LOYDGB21446

Post code: LA1 4XJ
City: Lancaster
Country: United Kingdom

We give thanks for the special ministry that God has given to us over two decades serving particularly the Liturgical and Pastoral needs of Orthodox students from Lancaster University and the citizens of the nearby towns. We aim to continue this ministry but to broaden it to serve the families who now attend our Community.

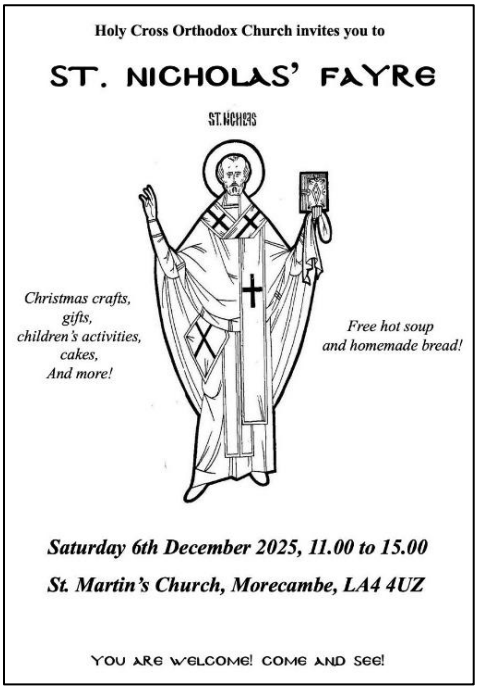
We are indeed blessed in having support from so many former parishioners "Stavronians" and having our extended family who offer prayers and donations to us from Cyprus, Greece, Romania, USA and elsewhere.

We ask your prayers in this holy task which is now before us and ask a blessing upon you in the name of the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-Giving and Undivided Trinity.

May God prosper this little plant in His Vineyard!

Christmas Fayre

Inspired by last year's success, Holy Cross church is organising St Nicholas' Fayre on Saturday 6th December 11:00--15:00. Please save the date in your calendars. There will be many stalls and free soup and home-made bread. If you want to have a stall or contribute something (for those who live at a distance and can't make it) then please contact Alexandra.



Iconostasis extension

With the blessing of Metropolitan Silouan, our Iconostasis is now planned to be extended by Christmas 2025. A preliminary sketch is shown above. If you would like to donate, please use the credentials above and specify "Iconostasis" in the description of payment.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Dec. 2: *Necoula*
Dec. 5: *Mary*
Dec. 6: *Shukria*
Dec. 10: *Èbraheem*
Dec. 14: *Alexandru*
Dec. 28: *Fr Augoustinos*
Katerina, Peter, Kostadina, Russi

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.

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 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
20th Dec: The repose of St. John of Kronstadt
25th Dec: **The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**
27th Dec: Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org. The Orthodox Calendar and Scriptural Readings Lectionary, including the British and Irish Saints, is available online at www.antiochian-orthodox.com/calendar

Services at St Martin's in December*		
Wed. 3rd	19:30	Online Prayer Meeting**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 6th	11:00–15:00	St Nicholas Fayre.
	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 7th	09:45	Divine Liturgy
Wed. 10th	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 13th	15.45	Great Vespers
Sun. 14th	09:45	Divine Liturgy. Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
Wed. 17th	19:30	Online Prayer group of St Seraphim and St Etheldreda**. Rule of St Pachomius*
Sat. 20th	15.45	Great Vespers
Sun. 21st	09:45	Divine Liturgy. Sunday of all the Righteous who pleased God, from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed.
		Eve of the Nativity
Wed. 24th	10:00	The Royal Hours
	20:00	Divine Liturgy for the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Sat. 27th	15:45	Great Vespers
Sun. 28th	09:45	Divine Liturgy

*May be subject to change. Please monitor the email updates and the parish's Facebook page.
**Via WhatsApp: https://call.whatsapp.com/video/1WnKsoP45eHcAukXpIYXrl

Online
Prayer Meeting
Weekly
on Wednesday
7:30 PM
via WhatsApp

Click here to join the meeting (no account needed):

https://call.whatsapp.com/video/1WnKsoP45eHcAukXpIYXrl

The Orthodox Christian Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross – Lancaster invites you to join our Online Prayer Group "Saint Seraphim & Saint Etheldreda".

With the blessing of Fr Jonathan Hemmings the prayer meetings of our parish group are back.

Included: Rule of St Pachomius with discussion.

2025 Fasting Calendar

LEGEND:
Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish, olive oil, wine
Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish, olive oil
Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs, fish
Abstain from meat, dairy, eggs
Abstain from meat

Note: On the day of a parish's patronal feast, fish wine and oil are allowed if it falls on a fasting day.

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"*God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith*"
-- St. George Karslides –

For further information please contact:

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Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross:
www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
the British Isles and Ireland: www.antiochian-orthodox.com

Orthodox online liturgical guide: www.antiochian.org/liturgicday

Online Orthodox Calendar and Scriptural Readings Lectionary:
https://www.antiochian-orthodox.com/calendar

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in English at orthodoxcityhermit.com

Top and bottom sketches are created at the Holy Monastery of "The Annunciation of the Theotokos" Chios, Greece, courtesy of Fr Theodosios Dendrinos, Ithaca, Greece.
The sketch of Christ by Photis Kontoglou was scanned from the Orthodox calendar of the *Apostoliki Diakonia* of the Church of Greece.