



SAINT PHOTIOS ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΟΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΣΧΟΛΗ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΩΤΙΟΥ  
510 Collier Way, Post Office Box 797  
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## A Light in the Darkness: Seminary Expansion Campaign

### CASE FOR SUPPORT

Dear Supporters of the Saint Photios  
Orthodox Theological Seminary,

May 16, 2023

Christ is Risen! May God bless you!

#### **The Market—Talents, Virtues, and Spiritual Reality**

In several of His parables, our Lord addresses our labors for salvation in imagery taken from the marketplace.

In the Gospel Parable of the Talents, “a certain nobleman went into a far country” and entrusted considerable sums (“talents”) to each of his servants, “to every man according to his several ability,” instructing them to “occupy” with those deposits until He came back. As we know, on His return, the Nobleman—universally understood to be our Lord Himself—received bountiful returns from several of His servants. He praised them as having been “faithful in a very little” and rewarded them many times over, making them lords over whole “cities” equal in number to the talents of profit they had returned. Conversely, the Lord condemned the servant who cowered before the risk of trading with His talent, who failed to return even “usury” on His investment.

In his homily on the Rich Man and Lazarus, Saint Gregory Palamas expands on this theme of spiritual commerce. Specifically, he laments that there is nothing akin to currency in the world of virtue. We cannot quantify, buy, sell, or even trade, according to our excess or deficiency, chastity, righteousness, truthfulness, forbearance, and the whole array of virtues that, in their totality, constitute the perfection expected by our Lord of each of us.

Despite the sad fact that there is no “currency of virtue,” the Saint notes that, in His compassion, our Lord did not leave us to our own feeble resources in the daunting task of cultivating the soul’s virtues. He appointed that the least valuable things we possess, “food and drink, clothing, ...gold and silver,” all of which are no more than “earth and dust,” should be the means by which we make up for our “deficiency in virtues and escape punishment for being without them.”

By sharing our goods with those possessed of virtue, the Saint continues, we participate in what “the great Paul...calls...‘fellowship with the saints.’” According to this spiritual commerce, we who are impoverished of the spiritual goods expected by our Lord can share our worldly goods with those laboring in virtue and thereby prompt a mysterious exchange, such that our “abundance may be a supply for their want, [and] that their abundance also may be a supply for...[our] want” (cf. II Corinthians 8:4, 14). This, says the Saint, is precisely what the Lord means by making ourselves “friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,” denoting, by that phrase, “what is over and above our requirements and...[can be] passed on to those in need.” As Saint Gregory writes:

Each of us, brethren, must, as I have said, practice every virtue, but if we lack one of them, we have to make up for what is missing by sharing what we have. This is the next best way of fulfilling Christ's word, ...and by it we can secure the salvation of your souls.

### **The Inspiration—A Walk Down the Halls**

Even though my tears for my impoverished soul dried up long ago, I have only to walk the halls of our beloved Seminary and look in on the classrooms, offices, study carrels, or iconography studio to be moved to tears with compunctious and grateful thoughts. I see inspired souls hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I see devout monastics, professors, and instructors who have denied themselves worldly comforts in order to minister to the Church and Her future servants. I see administrators who work long hours, often without compensation, to keep a sacred enterprise on track. And I see students focused on their studies, contemplating the image of the invisible God.

As I expand my vision, I see people who have labored hard in this world to scrimp and save ounces, pounds, or even tons of “gold and silver,” and yet have not hesitated to return it to our Lord’s service in the sacred institution of the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary, where there is no doubt that both the widow’s mite and the nobleman’s talent are received, counted, and valued by the all-seeing eye of our philanthropic Savior.

In short, I see virtue, cultivated and practiced in many and diverse forms, and I see those who wisely invest of their talents and have “fellowship with the saints,” collaborating in a mystical communion and benefitting others—and thereby themselves. And I give thanks to our Gracious Lord, Who accounts even me worthy to share in this spiritual commerce.

### **The Project—Expanding the Seminary Facility**

The Seminary is now embarking on a significant building expansion project to more than double its facility from 10,500 square feet to 26,000 square feet and hence its capacity to serve the Church.

#### **The case for this undertaking is clear:**

- Our world is increasingly alienated from the way, truth, and life of the Orthodox Christian Faith, even as more and more people understand that they suffer on account of the world's vanity and look for a meaningful alternative. The Seminary is one of the best options we can provide to help with this meaning crisis.
- Our parishes are served by an aging population of clergy, with the average age of our Priests being over fifty-five. The majority of these clergy do not have candidates in place as successors. Over the next two decades, we will face a wave of retirements that will present a disproportionate need for new Priests, the majority of which our Seminary must provide.

- Our missions around the country grow in number. Many have no Priests assigned to them, and many others drain the resources of established parishes, borrowing their Priests on a rotational basis. Both for these missions' survival and the well-being of our established parishes, these missions need their own clergy.
- The Seminary is now able to sponsor visas for students from abroad. We now have the opportunity to serve our international Church by enrolling foreign students and preparing them for missionary labors in their country of origin. At the same time, their residencies at the Seminary will swell the ranks of our student body and put increased demands on our facility.
- The Hierarchy of our Church has asked us to increase our program offerings in order to accommodate a wider range of college-bound students who might otherwise perish in secular institutions fast losing academic integrity and a moral compass. As we widen our program offerings to disciplines that are more common for liberal arts education (e.g., art, history, philosophy, language, etc.), we will significantly widen the field of potential applicants and consequently grow our student body, adding further pressure to the demands on our facility.

Our Board of Directors recognizes these challenges and opportunities and has reasoned, correctly, that it must take action now to meet them in a responsible manner. It has enthusiastically approved an ambitious expansion project that will better enable our Seminary to serve our Lord and His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

The project cost is estimated to be \$6,000,000. Once completed, the expansion project will significantly increase the capacity of the Seminary, from our current capacity of fifteen to a future capacity of fifty students. The expansion will include the following:

- eighteen new dorm rooms
- an expanded chapel
- a new library three times the size of the existing one
- a new, larger dining hall
- an expanded kitchen
- three additional classrooms
- a spacious new iconography studio
- a student lounge and recreational room
- office space for faculty and administrators
- a separate wing for visiting scholars
- an auditorium with 100+ occupancy

Besides addressing our current needs, the expansion will also enable our Seminary to increase the number and range of its academic programs, thereby meeting the ever-growing needs of our Church.

### **The Vision—An Education for Tomorrow and Eternity**

In the twenty-first century, Orthodox theological education is facing many special challenges. It must deal with the increasing deviations in the society around us from the religious and moral values of traditional Christian life. At the same time, it is confronted with deviations in the Orthodox world itself from the unified witness of Holy Tradition, the Patristic consensus, and the indispensable Biblical foundations of our doctrines, moral behavior, and Church polity. The Seminary clearly sees its

role as an essential one in the defense of our Faith against innovation and the preservation of all we have inherited from Christ. Hence, the motto of the Seminary, from the words of the Holy Apostle Paul in his Second Epistle to the Greek Christians of Thessalonica: “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught” (II Thessalonians 2:15).

This was echoed in our own days by Saint Philaret of New York, who begins his last will and spiritual testament with the exhortation from Scripture to “hold that fast which thou hast!” Not every Seminary student will be called to the Priesthood, but each of them will have had the opportunity to inherit the priceless spiritual wealth of the Orthodox Church that Saint Philaret goes on to describe as *“the beauty and majesty of our Orthodox Divine Services and a living participation in them through faith and prayer; the plenitude of the grace-filled spiritual life that is open to each and every one.”*

All of the students will spend the formative years of their lives studying the Orthodox Faith, deepening their inner and spiritual lives, becoming active and serving members of a vibrant local Orthodox community, all of which will draw them closer to Christ. They will absorb, embody, and be transformed by the *“teachings of the Faith, our marvelous, salvific Orthodox Faith.”* This will ensure that future generations of laborers in Christ’s vineyard are ready and able to pass down the richness and spiritual wealth that the Holy Church possesses.

Seminary graduates will be prepared to serve the Church in whatever capacity She may call them: clergy, teachers, choir directors, chanters, iconographers, missionaries, and catechists. Thus they will join the ranks of those *“countless living examples of...people who have lived according to the Faith, according to the lofty principles and rules that the Church offers us.”* Thank God, for years we have been blessed in having wise and experienced clergymen in many of our parishes. But we must be proactive and think of the future, our own future and that of generations to come.

### **“Without Schools, We Walk in Darkness!”**

This was a cry sounded by Saint Kosmas of Aitolia, who, while traveling the breadth of Greece in the eighteenth century, called an entire country to awaken and to invest in its future by building Orthodox schools. This was the much-needed cry for a people who for almost two thousand years had been sanctified by the preaching of the Apostles, the teachings of innumerable Saints, the blood of Martyrs and the piety of simple laity, who passed down from generation to generation their love for Christ and His Holy Church, but who were in danger of losing this precious heritage because of a lack of education.

How much more must we, here in the West, invest in education to ensure a bright future! The expansion project will make the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary a shining light for our parishes and Church communities throughout the country and around the world. Now, more than ever, we must do our part to be “the light of the world,” to raise our light and let it shine, being a beacon of truth, faith, hope, and Christian love.

### **The Goal—Where Two or Three are Gathered Together**

Glory be to God, Phase One of the Seminary expansion project is complete as of January 2023. The site has been graded and the entire foundation has been poured.

This spring, we will be embarking on “A Light in the Darkness: Seminary Expansion Campaign” to raise the full \$6,000,000 needed to continue construction of the expansion.

Brothers and Sisters, join us.

Do not leave your talents—be they prayers, encouragement, or even the material support of a mite—buried in the earth. Our talents are not our own but were received from our Lord in the expectation of a significant return. Left in the ground, they revert to a baseless currency—mere “earth and dust,” as Saint Gregory Palamas says. Even worse, they serve to our harm. But when shared with those cultivating virtue, imbibing the Faith, and laboring in our Lord’s vineyard, they mysteriously yield a plentiful return, benefitting both others and ourselves.

I ask you kindly to do your part by contributing to the expansion of your Seminary.

Use and invest your material riches to obtain, increase, and share with countless others the priceless spiritual wealth of the Orthodox Church. Benefit the dedicated laborers in our Lord’s Church and those whom they serve and will serve, as well as your very own souls, by supporting, collaborating, and taking fellowship with the devout servants and students of the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary.

Thank you! And may God inspire, strengthen, and bless you and your loved ones.

Your Humble Servant,



† Bishop Auxentios of Etna and Portland  
President, Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary