

"I AM THE VINE,...

...YE ARE THE BRANCHES"

THE GRAPEVINE

Vignettes of Seminary Life

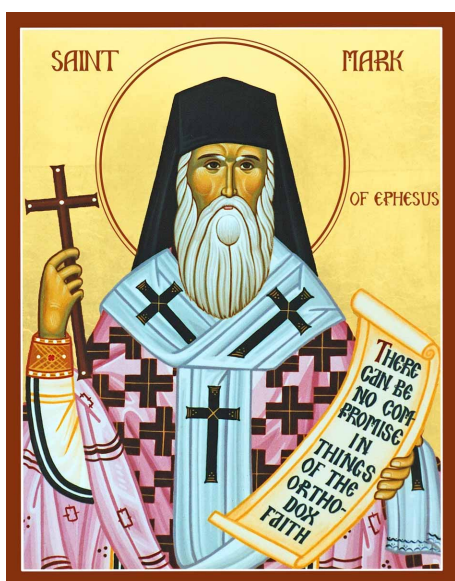
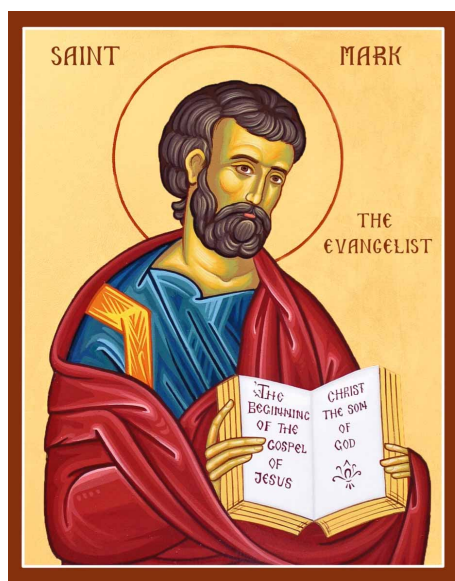


Summer in Scott Valley

The Puzzle Was Coming Together. For all of my life, understanding Greek in Church had been a very difficult puzzle, and I would often give up trying to solve it. I grew up attending a parish that would conduct a portion of the Divine Services in Greek, but I could never fully understand those parts of the Services. I was unable to read or write Modern Greek, although I was vaguely familiar with it and could exchange basic greetings. Since I effectively knew only one language, I was unsure of what to think when I saw an ancient and unspoken language on the Seminary class

schedule: Koinē Greek. I had not yet realized the importance of this language for Holy Scripture and Christian Tradition. Also, I had not yet discovered how enjoyable it could be to learn another language, especially if the teacher makes it fun. Finally, I had not yet experienced the rewards of learning how to put together the puzzle of my youth.

Koinē Greek was the lingua franca of much of the Mediterranean region and the Middle East from approximately 300 B.C. to A.D. 1400, with only minor variations over the course of that time. It is also known as Biblical Greek, because



both the Septuagint and the New Testament were written in Koinē. The Septuagint was translated from Hebrew by seventy-two Jewish scribes into Koinē at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who reigned over two hundred years before Christ. This translation was part of the expansion of the Library of Alexandria, which was already the largest library in the world and included predominantly Greek texts. Church Tradition teaches that the Holy Spirit guided these scribes, who each, independently of the others, produced the same translation, making it the authoritative Old Testament text for Orthodox Christians. With the possible exceptions of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews, the New Testament was also originally written in Koinē by the Apostles and Evangelists, less than one hundred years after Christ. The importance of this language can be realized in a single fact: from Saint Mark the Evangelist († 63) all the way to Saint Mark of Ephesus (ca. 1392–1444), people were writing in some form or derivative of Koinē Greek.

To my surprise, learning this important language has also been fun. Our

instructor, Father Chrysostomos, usually warms up the class with a joke that relates to grammar or sentence structure, or sometimes he will begin with a pun or a Greek tongue twister. Normally we spend class time going over vocabulary, then taking turns reading sacred texts out loud and translating them. Having to read aloud things you might hear in Church in a foreign language is a pretty strange experience. This constant repetition helps to reinforce basic language rules and is really enjoyable—if you understand the value of it. Before coming to this class, I had no idea how to read Greek, but now I slowly read parts from Scripture or daily prayers to solidify what I have learned.

Just three hours a week for twelve weeks has made such a difference in my attitude towards learning Greek. The first time that I noticed this difference was during a Church Service at the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery. I was standing in Church listening, and the chanters began in Greek. At first, it was passing me by as usual, but then I noticed a word. Then another. And then another. This experience was very

new to me: noticing these words and being able to separate them from the rest. Understanding the language in this setting was a completely new feeling. I was so excited that the puzzle was coming together, and now, standing in Church, I was deciphering the language for the first time. This does not mean I am bilingual yet, but I am very excited to begin the more advanced Greek courses the Seminary has to offer—just that feeling of the puzzle coming together was awesome.

Vasilios Athanasiou, B.Th. Student

Dear Diary: Graduation Day! Lord, Glory to Thee!

Seven years ago, I was in their place. I had reached that milestone: I was a graduate! I remember my college friends all bursting with joy as they planned outfits and parties for their big day. The school sent out fancy invitations to register for

the ceremony, along with order forms for regalia and special graduate merchandise....

It was a week after the ceremony that my mother asked, “So, when is graduation?” She was not very pleased at my response, but at no point did I have the desire to participate. What would I miss? To sit in a sea of students, most of whom I had never seen before? To listen to speeches from administrators who would not even take the time to read my name? To pay hundreds of dollars for a ticket to an event in which I am supposed to be the honored guest? I was happy I achieved my goal, but above all I was grateful to God that after five years of spiritual warfare as a college student I still preferred to be at the Divine Liturgy rather than walking across that stage on a Sunday morning.

“Graduation day” meant very little to me—until today. What a cause for

The Class of 2021 with Seminary administrators (from left to right): Gabrielle Asgarian, Registrar; Bishop Auxentios, Rector; Schemamonk Vlasie; Monk Innocent; Reader Timothy Granger; Kira Rapp; Archimandrite Patapios, Dean; and Alexei Bushunow, Communications and Development Director





celebration, my Lord! What a redemption for the world of higher education! What for me was a day of empty words was for our graduates a day of reflection, thanksgiving, family, and hope. Each graduate was honored by those who had formed them; those who, day after day for three years, had taught them, counseled them, cooked with them, eaten with them, and prayed with them. They were honored by the very type of people they hope to be: Your servants! Bishops, monastics, clergy, families, friends. No one extra and no one excluded. We celebrate this day because these men and women are far greater than who they were the day they arrived. What they have gained is precious in the eyes of God. How did You reach them? Whom did You inspire to encourage them? May they be rewarded! Today we witnessed the fruits of those who do Your Good Will.

Graduates, know that you are blessed. While the rest of the world tells you, “You can do anything,” you will understand, “I can do nothing without God.” This will be your greatest tool for success in this life, and this is what you take with you as a graduate of the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary.

Gabrielle Asgarian, Registrar

New Student Career Services Director.
Andrei Charles Kovacs was born in the

Bronx, New York City. He completed his undergraduate education at Hunter College and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he finished his doctoral coursework in art history in Early Christian, Byzantine, and Russian art and iconography at Harvard University. He then began working in career services at Harvard University, Harvard Business School, and then Yale School of Management on the directorial level. Moving north, Andrei and his family resettled in Maine, where he was the Director of Career Services at Bates College in Lewiston. Currently, he is the Director of the Center for Career Services at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. He has published works, articles, and self-paced tutorials on jobs and employment processes, and has taught courses in art history, portfolio courses for illustration students, credited internship courses, and, most recently, a course on professionalism.

Several years ago, Bishop Auxentios, the Rector of the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary, asked me to consider helping his students with their career needs. Because I have been a career counselor, advisor, and job coach at colleges, universities, and graduate schools for many years, Bishop Auxentios thought I might be able to assist the students at the Seminary. One might wonder why a seminary whose aim is the spiritual training of men and women for future service in the Orthodox Church might need my assistance. Moreover, the theological, spiritual, academic, and personal formation at Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary is of the highest quality. Students are well prepared for service to the Church and her faithful. Be assured that your sons and daughters, your nephews and nieces, your grandsons and granddaughters are learning from highly qualified and eminent individuals the critical and focused skills, history,

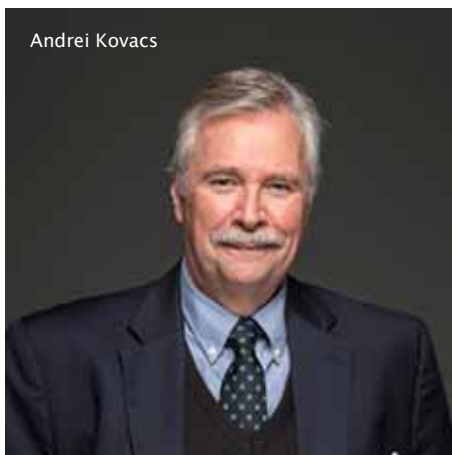
techniques, and core abilities needed to function in their chosen spiritual roles.

In his wisdom, Bishop Auxentios grasped an essential reality of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians in North America: most of our Priests, Deacons, chanters, and catechetical teachers have jobs and positions in addition to—and, in most cases, essential for—their families, enabling them to function in spiritual roles for their Churches. The majority of parishes are small and are unable to support a full-time Priest. Indeed, many Priests rely on their families or their own unique skills and career abilities to support their needs. Our situation is not uncommon and echoes the history of traditional Orthodox communities from Apostolic times.

We traditionalist Orthodox live and worship in a predominantly heterodox culture. Therefore, our talented and motivated students will need viable employment. There is no question that the application of academic, theological, and spiritual training from the Seminary will have traction in a work environment. There are functions, jobs, and internships directly relevant to their studies. At an initial presentation I gave to the students, I shared a list—by no means exhaustive—of developed skills as a correlation to their studies at the Seminary through their courses and living on campus:

- Reading fluently
- Comprehending and analyzing concepts
- Thinking critically
- Ideating
- Analyzing texts
- Utilizing print and electronic resources, both primary and secondary
- Identifying historical and cultural themes
- Translating linguistic and formal ideas
- Summarizing insights
- Contrasting viewpoints

Andrei Kovacs



- Identifying and fusing themes
- Explaining ideas
- Developing and synthesizing information
- Expressing thoughts verbally and in writing
- Defending thinking and insights
- Explaining historical concepts
- Gaining linguistic abilities
- Modifying concepts through discussions
- Comprehending theological, Biblical, and spiritual theories
- Understanding and expressing liturgical traditions
- Synthesizing sources and concepts
- Comparing and contrasting arguments
- Critiquing ideas logically
- Developing creative insights
- Prioritizing accepted wisdom
- Understanding divergent points of view
- Creating texts
- Citing sources
- Editing texts
- Presenting findings
- Incorporating critiques into strengthened final works
- Meeting deadlines
- Managing projects
- Balancing competing schedules
- Leading groups
- Working within a team
- Negotiating practical options
- Developing alternative operations
- Tutoring and teaching others
- Serving the community



Students hiking in the Marble Mountains

- Supporting and advising others
- Developing training approaches
- Resolving conflicts
- Developing, balancing, and managing budgets
- Mastering musical, artistic, and computer skills
- Utilizing media, publication, and communication talents

This list is identical to the hard and soft skills of students at some of the best colleges and universities. Moreover, most of these skills have correlations to employment options. Supplementing this list, many students at the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary have prior academic experience, summer or part-time jobs, internships, and linguistic and other abilities. The individual skills, work habits, and goals of the students are enhanced by challenging educational and spiritual training at the Seminary, setting the stage for a gainful career in the future.

Seminary students can develop a practical and realistic sense of what they can offer an employer, internship sponsor, or advanced training program. This critical self-assessment process is an ongoing internal dialogue captured in the Greek phrase, “ἑωθὶ σεαυτόν,” “Know thyself.” During initial presentations I have given to the Seminary students, they learned to take two standard career assessment instruments, the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). These web-based programs aid students in verifying their skills, motivations, work habits, and style-preference behaviors in learning, communication, leadership, and job hunting. If students chose to take these instruments, we reviewed the findings in private and confidential Zoom meetings. In addition, they received personalized materials for further analysis. Follow-up meetings were also made available.

These instruments can help verify their career direction, identify specialties of focus in their choices, or detect options for further research. The internal dialogue must express what students know and understand about their abilities for their careers, job applications, additional training, or certificate programs. Essentially, applicants must comprehend the value they bring to the workplace with the accelerated changes in the economy. Once plans and options are identified and verified, the application process follows.

Future presentations and training for students will focus on developing “comprehensive learner records” or résumés that effectively sum up what has been gained during the college experience and iterate capabilities through and beyond the academic transcript. This allows employers to grasp the candidate’s strengths quickly and ultimately afford the applicant a means for expressing the intricacies and subtleties of their abilities during the interview process with confidence. In addition, with students’ understanding of their range of knowledge, skills, and experiences, they can navigate the application procedures.

The career training for students aims to offer focus, practical insights, techniques, and tools to maintain momentum and opportunities through and beyond the outstanding academics and training at the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary. Blended options through summer work or internships can assist in a pre- or post-seminary training and assist in finding real opportunities in a changing economic landscape.

I value and appreciate Bishop Auxentios’s foresight and generous invitation to offer career assistance to the Seminary students; I offer special thanks to Alexei Bushunow, the Communications and Development Director, for his logistical

support and insights; and I look forward to offering career, employment, internship, and continuing education and training options to the student body.

Andrei Charles Kovacs,
Student Career Services Director

Icon of the Mother of God of Pochaev.

The following miracle of the Mother of God, which I translated as an exercise for my Russian class at the Seminary, shows how eager she is to come to the aid of those who ask for her help in adversities. It is especially pertinent in our days because it shows us that, in the face of dangers, we are not alone and helpless; rather, what cannot be done by man is easily accomplished by Divine Grace.

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The Mother of God gave wondrous assistance to the defenders of her monastery in the year 1675 when the Turks besieged Pochaev. The monastery was comprised of mostly wooden buildings and was difficult to defend. The defenders' only hope was the Mother of God, and with tears the monks prayed before her Icon. The Abbot instructed them to sing the Akathist to the Mother of God. As soon as the monks began singing “To thee, O Guardian Leader,” the Turks saw a marvelous vision above the Church. The Mother of God appeared in brilliant radiance as a majestic woman shining brighter than the sun and covering Pochaev with her omophorion, as if protecting it by her might. She was escorted by a multitude of Angels in armor carrying swords of lightning. It appeared to the Turks that the Heavenly soldiers were pursuing them, and the Turks turned to flight. And when the defenders of Pochaev came out to pursue them, they routed the Turks entirely. The Turks did not forget this defeat for a long time.

Half a century later, a monk from Pochaev, Gabriel, was passing through Constantinople and began speaking to one of the Turks. When the Turk found out that the monk was from Pochaev, he asked, “Is your goddess still alive?”

Discerning to what the Turk was alluding, the monk answered, “She is alive and well, and will continue living forever.”

“Your goddess is fierce!” the Turk exclaimed emphatically. “My father and many of our people died there. I was young at the time, but I will never forget that calamity.”

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Icon of the Mother of God of Pochaev
July 23 (Old Style)
Apolytikion, Tone 5

Those who pray before thy holy Icon, O Lady, are vouchsafed healing and receive knowledge of the true Faith, and they repel the attacks of the Hagarines. Therefore, entreat remission of sins for us who fall down before thee. Enlighten our hearts through thoughts of piety and raise a prayer to thy Son to save our souls!

Kira Rapp, B.Th. Graduate