

"I AM THE VINE,...

...YE ARE THE BRANCHES"

# THE GRAPEVINE

*Vignettes of Seminary Life*

Members of the faculty and administration of the Seminary with the students and conference attendees



**Recruitment Conference.** During the week of February 16 through February 22, 2020, the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary hosted a recruitment conference for prospective students. The attendees, who included young people and a few parents from various parishes of the American Eparchy of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, were able to participate in the life of the Seminary by staying in student housing, by auditing classes, and by sharing meals with the students. In addition to being able to experience the usual routine of the Seminary firsthand, the attendees also participated in several special events, including tours of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery, the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia, and the Saints Cypri-

an and Justina Orthodox Church, all located in Etna, as is the Seminary.

On Sunday, February 16, the First-Year Memorial for the ever-memorable Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Etna, the founding father of the Seminary, was held at his graveside, at the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery, followed by a special memorial banquet hosted by the Sisterhood of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia, which was held in the dining hall of the Seminary. On the evening of the following day, Hierodeacon Photii, a graduate of the Seminary and now one of its Instructors, introduced the Patron Saint of the Seminary in a public lecture entitled, "Saint Photios the Great: Patriarch of Constantinople, Confessor, and Equal-to-the-Apostles." Dr. John

C. B. Petropoulos, an Adjunct Professor at the Seminary, also delivered a public lecture, on the evening of the following day, entitled, “The Reception of Æsop’s Fables in Ancient Greece and Byzantium.” Both lectures, which were held in the auditorium of the Seminary, were well received by their audiences.

On February 19 (that is, February 6 Old Style), Bishop Auxentios of Etna and Portland, Rector of the Seminary, served an Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in honor of the Patron Saint of the Seminary, Saint Photios the Great, in the Church of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia. After the Divine Liturgy, a festal banquet in honor of Saint Photios the Great, hosted, once again, by the Sisterhood, was held in the dining hall of the Seminary. Later that evening, the students and the attendees were invited to join the Seminary administration in a discussion, held in the auditorium, about future plans for expanding the Seminary’s facilities. The final group activity was an informal dinner followed by a question and answer session, held in the dining hall on Thursday evening.

All of the lay students—Timothy Granger, Uriah Lantzer, Kira Rapp, Teodora Munteanu, Aliya Molinari, and Julie Ling—contributed in various ways to the activities held throughout the week. Among the visitors who attended the conference were Alexei Bushunow,

Gabrielle Asgarian, Rachel Schenone, Esther Schenone, Ruth Schenone, Elizabeth Schenone, Sonia Winburne, Nikolaos Papadopoulos, Zossima Granger, Presbytera Christine Chernjavsky, Benjamin Chernjavsky, Elizabeth Chernjavsky, Konstantinos Kontogiannes, Nektarios Kontogiannes, and Elizabeth Wieber. The Seminary sincerely thanks all those whose participation in the recruitment conference made it such a memorable event!

*Father Gregory, Registrar*

**Christmas Concert.** Four days before Western Christmas, the choir of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia and the students of the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary held a Christmas concert for the people and surrounding residents of the small town of Etna, California. The monks of the Saint Gregory Palamas monastery, the nuns of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia, and the entire student population of the Seminary were involved in the preparations. Although available to the wider public via the Internet, the purpose of the concert was to familiarize the local community better with ourselves, our Church, and our traditions. We hoped to present a program that was both spiritually uplifting and also lighthearted.

The choral presentation included not only Nativity hymns and traditional



The nuns and the students performing at the Christmas concert



The female students in folk costume

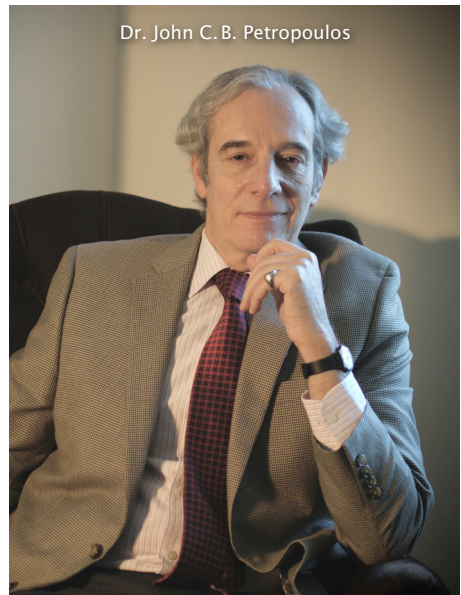
Western carols, but also popular carols from Greece, Russia, and Ukraine. The a cappella singing was presented in two, three, and even four parts and was accompanied by a large-screen slide presentation of scenic views of our beautiful mountain valley. The female students of the Seminary—Julie Ling, Teodora Munteanu, Aliya Molinari, and myself—wore folk costumes inspired by each of our ethnic heritages: Chinese, Romanian, Irish, and Russian, respectively. Timothy Granger, one of the male students, introduced each choral piece with a bit about its history or origin, and Uriah Lantzer, another of the male students, not only played several lively tunes on his hammered dulcimer, but also gave a brief history of this stringed, zither-like instrument of Persian and possibly Celtic origin.

The concert itself was followed by refreshments prepared by the nuns and the students. We had the opportunity to meet with the members of the local community and answer the questions of many who might not have otherwise approached us, providing us a valuable opportunity to witness to our Faith. We

also had the opportunity to eat what were, in my opinion, some of the best cookies ever. To our surprise, the fasting cookies prepared for the Orthodox community—and labeled “vegan”—were some of the most popular. If the requests we received for us to repeat the concert this coming Christmas season are any indication, the concert was a tremendous success.

*Kira Rapp, B.Th. Student*

**Prestigious Appointment.** The Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary is delighted to announce that Dr. John C.B. Petropoulos, Professor of Ancient Greek Literature at the Democritean University of Thrace, Director Emeritus of Harvard University’s Center for Hellenic Studies in Nafplion, Greece, and an Adjunct Professor at the Seminary, has recently been selected as one of the senior editors of a major ongoing project based at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C., “A Homer Commentary in Progress.” This project constitutes, according to Gregory Nagy of Harvard University, one of its founding authors, “the first



Dr. John C.B. Petropoulos

and only such commentary that is based squarely on the cumulative research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, who together created a new way of thinking about Homeric poetry,” namely, that it “is a system generated from oral traditions.”

Professor Petropoulos, who earned his D.Phil. from the University of Oxford under the supervision of Sir Kenneth Dover, is well known in the world of classical philology as a specialist in Homer. In 2011, his book *Kleos in a Minor Key: The Homeric Education of a Little Prince*, an important study of a somewhat neglected character in the Odyssey, Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, was published by the Center for Hellenic Studies.

The Administration and Faculty of the Seminary congratulate Professor Petropoulos on his appointment to the editorial team of such an important new project in Homeric studies.

*Father Patapios*, Dean

**Student Pilgrimage.** With the blessing of Bishop Auxentios, the Rector of the Seminary, I set my second-year New Testament students the task of proposing a field trip destination which they were to defend using the Epistles we were studying that semester. While every student approached it differently, ultimately they each proposed a pilgrimage to venerate the Relics of Saint John of San Francisco, which the Bishop also blessed. So, early on Friday, January 24, 2020, we set out. Our party consisted of Mother Kypriane (who had kindly consented to be our driver, planner, and overseer), myself, and the three students, Timothy Granger, Uriah Lantzer, and Kira Rapp.

Our first stop was in Sacramento, where we had arranged to tour three elder care facilities, because we are hoping to establish a residential care facility for the elderly of our own—the Saints Martha and Mary Residence—in Etna in the near future. The owner had kindly agreed to show us around. The three homes were the nicest I have ever seen. The love and



The office of Saint John of San Francisco at Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk Orthodox Church

care of the owner was evident in every beautifully appointed room, every clean sheet, and every smile of the residents at his greeting. To our surprise, we met several Orthodox residents, and one in particular made a lasting impression. There she sat, with a church calendar in her lap, surrounded by Icons, quite unaware that we were coming but so full of unfeigned joy at our appearance. We were not sure to whom God had given the greater blessing in our meeting—her or us! And this was to be but the first of many joys as we continued on to San Francisco.

The next day, we first visited the Golden Gate National Cemetery in order to locate the grave of my maternal grandfather, who had served in the Air Force. Amid the precise rows of headstones extending in all directions, marking the resting places of so many who have served our country, we prayed not only for my grandfather but for all.

Our next intended destination was the home dedicated to Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, the location of Saint John's orphanage and office, but first we had

to learn the necessity of precision in programming GPS (apparently it really does matter whether you type in "street" or "avenue"). Needless to say, Saint Tikhon's did not turn out to be in a shady part of town halfway under a bridge, but we tried that first anyway.

Once back on track (and late), we finally found Saint Tikhon's. What a special place! There is a Chapel to the right of the entrance which is small but contains many spiritual treasures, including Icons, which we venerated, and a case holding the vestments of Archbishop Tikhon of San Francisco and Western America. In a room across the way were many Icons and old photographs of Saints and other people of great significance in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. Unfortunately, there was no one available to explain any of these things in detail, but it was still very interesting.

Down a narrow hallway was a tiny room which had apparently been Saint John's office. In this room were many things which had belonged to him. It



is difficult to describe how incredible it was to see and touch these objects which had been used and handled by our dear Saint. A large full-figure Icon of him there added to the sense of being greeted by him on our arrival. Such a small cramped room, but it contains such a palpable grace that the soul is tempted to cry out with Saint Peter, “It is good for us to be here!” But, of course, we could not stay.

Our next stop was Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church. One of the students, Kira Rapp, has some family history connected with this Church (her great-great-grandfather served as the Priest there at one time). We were soon very grateful that this connection had led us to visit, for the Church was magnificent, being beautifully adorned with traditional iconography. There, we had the opportunity to venerate the Relics of quite a few Saints, as well as a piece of a blanket which had belonged to the New Martyr Tsarevich Alexis and which had been crocheted by his mother, the New Martyr Tsaritsa Alexandra! We also learned that it was in this Church that the funeral for all the Royal Martyrs was celebrated (without their Relics being present, of course) fifty years after their martyrdom. The Church itself was built as a memorial to the Royal Martyrs, something which had added significance for Mother Kypriane and me, because our convent is dedicated to the Holy New Martyr Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia.

Next, we headed for the Holy Virgin Cathedral, dedicated to the Icon of the Theotokos “Joy of All Who Sorrow,” to venerate the Relics of Saint John himself. No doubt, the experience for each of us was both special and individual, so I will not try to describe it. Suffice it to say that it was very moving not only to venerate his Relics but to pray while so near to him for everyone at

home and for help in our endeavors at the Seminary. We were very blessed too in that it was quiet, with few others around, so that we had what was nearly a “private audience” with him. We had already begun and would continue to feel his love and care for us in every aspect of the trip, but standing there before him it was hard, indeed, to tear ourselves away.

We spent some time venerating the many Icons and other Relics in the Cathedral as well. In one case was a Relic of the Patron Saint of one of our students—the Holy Apostle Timothy. Another blessing! Right beside the shrine containing Saint John’s Relics, there were Icons with small reliquaries inserted in them of Saints Elizabeth and Barbara (the Patrons of our Convent), as well as of the Holy Elders of Optina, for whom we have a warm veneration as well. Would the blessings never cease? After spending some very special time with Saint John, we regretfully went on our way.

Stopping briefly at a lookout over the ocean, we continued on to the Old Cathedral in which Saint John had served before the Holy Virgin Cathedral was built. Here, we encountered yet more spiritual joy, for we were able to attend a *Moleben* to Saint John served before an Icon of him around which was draped (as if he were wearing it) his own *mantiya*. And as if that were not wonderful enough, at the end of the Service we were invited to kneel individually before his Icon with the *mantiya* wrapped about us while special prayers to the Saint were read over us. It was as if we were receiving not only the Saint’s blessing but his fatherly embrace as well. In addition to this, we were anointed with some of Saint John’s oil. It would seem that Saint John had now blessed us in every way, but it was not over yet. We were also able to hear several stories

about Saint John's miracles, which were a source of spiritual consolation. For, as we were told, the Saint appeared in a dream to a certain woman skeptical about the point of people putting so many names under his Reliquary, to whom Saint John himself sternly affirmed, "I read *every single name*."

That night we crossed the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge to get dinner, and on the way back, when we reached the toll booth, we were told that the driver in front of us had paid our toll too! What an unlooked-for kindness! In this small thing too we saw the blessing of our dear Saint John.

The next day, which was Sunday, we visited the Church of All Russian Saints in Burlingame, with which Kira's family also has a connection. The clergy and parishioners there were (as they were everywhere we went) very kind, gracious, and hospitable. Throughout the trip, it was a new experience for some of the students to meet so many other Orthodox Christians, and often

quite unexpectedly. They also had the chance to introduce and spread awareness of our Seminary, as well as to make use of things they had learned in speaking with other Orthodox youth.

This was the final day of our student pilgrimage, and we only had one more stop to make before heading home—the Serbian Cemetery in Colma. Several relatives of Kira's are buried here, as well as some other Orthodox Christians known to us, so we set about trying to locate the graves of each. We managed to find all but one of those for whom we were looking, and at each grave we sang the troparia for the reposed: "With the spirits of the righteous...." Among those whose graves we visited were those treasures of the Russian diaspora and legacy of the Optina Elders, Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch. Not finding the grave of one Priest whom we had sought, we went to the cemetery Chapel and sang the troparia there for him and for all. Eternal be their memory!



The pilgrims with the *mantiya* of San John of San Francisco at the Old Cathedral of the Holy Virgin

Finally, we turned towards home, but not without first crossing the Golden Gate Bridge and taking one last look at the city of San Francisco across the bay—the resting place of our intercessor, the Holy Hierarch John. Giving thanks to God and his Saint for the many blessings we had received, we returned home bringing some portion of the blessings back with us. We thank Bishop Auxentios for giving his blessing for this field trip and pilgrimage and hope it will not be the last of such spiritually profitable experiences for our students. Holy Hierarch John intercede for us!

*Mother Eupraxia*, Teaching Assistant

**Readers Tonsured.** On February 19 (that is, February 6 Old Style), I served an Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in honor of Saint Photios the Great in the Church of the Convent of Saint Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia. Saint Photios the Great is the Patron Saint of the Seminary, and before the commencement of the Divine Liturgy, it was with great joy that I tonsured as Readers two of the seminarians, Timothy Granger and Uriah Lantzer.

Reader Timothy, the son of converts to the Orthodox Faith, was reared in the Church, was home-schooled, and is currently in his second year of the Bachelor of Theology program at the Seminary. Also the son of converts and a convert himself, Reader Uriah was likewise home-schooled and is also in his second year of the Bachelor of Theology program. Both newly-tonsured Readers attend parishes of the American Eparchy of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece when back home, Reader Timothy being a parishioner of the Saint Matthew the Evangelist Orthodox Church, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Reader Uriah being a parishioner of the Saint John the Baptist Orthodox Church, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Divine Liturgy was attended not only by the local Orthodox community, but also by a number of pilgrims attending a week-long recruitment conference held at the Seminary. On behalf of all present, I extended my heartfelt congratulations to Reader Timothy and Reader Uriah on the occasion of their Tonsures and wished them many years of service to the Church. Χρόνια πολλά!

*Bishop Auxentios*, Rector



Bishop Auxentios tonsuring the new Readers