

the Light



AUGUST 2024
NEWSLETTER

DOMSE FALL RETREAT 2024

September 20 - 21, 2024

St. Ignatius Orthodox Church, Franklin, TN

In person [CLICK HERE FOR INFO!](#)

ANNUAL AMEN FALL RETREAT 2024

November 16, 2024

10:00 am - 1:00 pm EST

Virtual [CLICK HERE FOR INFO!](#)



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NEW FEATURE

Clergy Spotlight

The Remarkable Journey of Bishop Nicholas



Born in January 1963 into a devout Orthodox family in the ancient city of Damascus, Syria, the young man who would become our Bishop Nicholas spent his first 18 years attending the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, excelling in school, and becoming a world class athlete (he ran track!). Little did he know his path would take him far from the venerable streets of Damascus to the halls of academia and beyond, halfway across the globe.

At the tender age of 18, Bishop Nicholas took a leap of faith, immigrating to the United States in February 1981. Landing in Boston, MA, he enrolled at Northeastern University, where he collected a couple of degrees in the developing field of computer science. He earned a bachelor's degree in electrical and computer engineering and followed it up with a master's degree in computer engineering, specializing in the burgeoning world of object-oriented language design, architecture, and coding.

For nearly two decades, Bishop Nicholas dazzled the tech world as a computer engineer in the electronic design automation industry and other related fields. His career saw him rise through the ranks at companies like ViewLogic Systems and Synopsys Co., solving problems, managing teams, and attending and presenting at conferences in Sweden, France, England, Germany, Italy, and the USA. He even found time to teach electronics circuitry, circuit theory, and digital computers at the Wentworth Institute of Technology.

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In 2000, Bishop Nicholas began what would become a series of annual pilgrimages to visit Mount Athos, the beating heart of Orthodoxy's monastic life. This was a significant decision point in Sayedna's life and began a period of rapid, seismic change for him.

In 2002, with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Philip, Bishop Nicholas enrolled in Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. His sojourn in the business world had not dulled his academic edge a bit and he graduated in 2005, receiving his M.Div. with highest distinction. Sayedna was already fluent in Arabic and English, and proficient in French; his time at Holy Cross helped him gain scholarly proficiency in Hebrew, Ancient Greek, New Testament Greek, and Modern Greek. This plethora of languages prepared him to study and research theological subjects across many cultures, times, and regions.

While still a student at Holy Cross, it became clear to Bishop Nicholas and to our hierarchs that Christ had called Sayedna to ordained ministry. He was ordained to the holy diaconate by His Eminence Metropolitan Philip on April 23, 2004, and to the holy priesthood by His Grace Bishop Antoun on January 9, 2005.

Upon graduating from Holy Cross, he was sent to St. Philip Antiochian Orthodox Church in Fort Lauderdale, FL, where he served as pastor for six and a half years. For his dedication he was elevated to Archimandrite in 2010. Subsequently, he was consecrated to the episcopacy in 2011 as an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of North America.

Bishop Nicholas spent the first six years of his episcopacy as the Metropolitan's episcopal assistant, helping to manage the broader affairs of the Archdiocese. But since October 2017, Bishop Nicholas has been entrusted with the care and feeding of the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast (DOMSE).

When Bishop Nicholas took the helm of DOMSE, he oversaw 36 churches and missions across nine states. That number of parish communities has since grown to 41—and continues to grow! His twice-yearly visits to our parishes for spiritual retreats have become legendary. He has prioritized cultivating healthy relationships with our youth so that they feel a direct connection to the Church.

A champion of Orthodox spirituality and ethos, Bishop Nicholas has set a vision for our diocese: to become more God-like daily. He often quotes Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," emphasizing the pursuit of virtues and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As the spiritual father to hundreds, Bishop Nicholas guides his spiritual children along the narrow path to salvation, leaving behind worldly desires and embracing the image and likeness of God.

In short, Bishop Nicholas is a testament to a life lived in service, intellect, and faith, inspiring those around him to strive for divine likeness with humor, humility, and a touch of holy tenacity.





FEATURED ORGANIZATION

Christian Education

DOMSE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COORDINATOR:

Anna-Sarah Farha | St. George Church, Jacksonville, FL



DOMSECHRISTIANED

Sharing the Mystery of Dormition with Children

Shortly before we head back to school, we begin preparing for the final feast of the Church year: the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos. At this feast, we celebrate the “falling asleep” (dormition) of the Theotokos. The disciples were miraculously brought together with the Theotokos in Jerusalem, and they were with her when she fell asleep in the Lord. Only Thomas was not present for her falling asleep and her burial. When he arrived a few days later and they opened her tomb so that he could see her body for one last time, they discovered that it was no longer there! Our Lord had taken her body to Heaven, giving all of us hope of eternal life!

How do we explain this miracle to our children when we can barely wrap our own minds around it? Well, because it is a miracle, we cannot explain it. However, perhaps we can offer a slightly similar concept. We can invite the children to think of their favorite toy (especially if they had a particularly favored “lovey” when they were little). Have them imagine parting with that favorite, and only receiving part of it back again. Invite someone in your family to tell their story if they ever left a favorite toy behind.

Perhaps one of those stories would work for the comparison. If not, you could tell a story from your own life/family, or just share this made-up example:

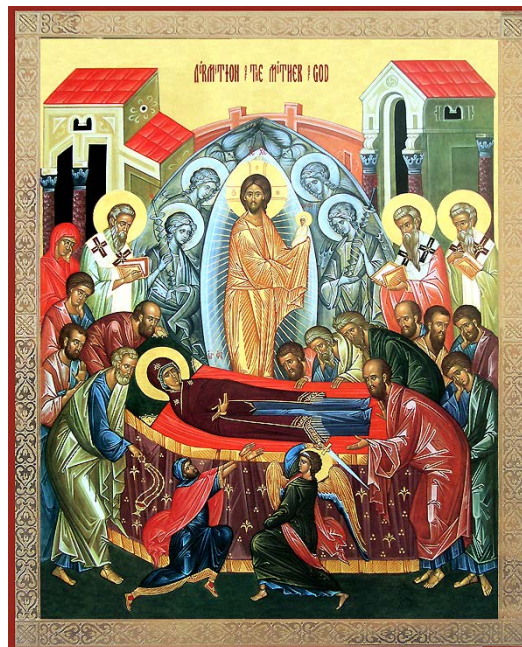
There once was a young girl named Juliana. Juliana was given a stuffed rabbit when she was a baby, and she really came to love that rabbit. Juliana named him Blue. From the moment she was old enough to grab him, Blue went everywhere with her! One time while on family vacation, Juliana accidentally left Blue at a restaurant where her family stopped for dinner. An hour down the road after dinner, she

discovered that Blue was missing. Juliana loved Blue and could not be without him. So, her family had to drive all the way back to that restaurant to pick him up! Do you think that Juliana would have been happy if the family only took part of Blue away from the restaurant and just left the rest of him there? No, of course not! Well, it’s a tiny bit like that, here. Our Lord really loved His mother, the Theotokos. Of course, she was not a toy, but she was favored by God because she lived such a holy life. When she departed this earthly life to go to Heaven, Our Lord took all of her – even her body – to Heaven, too! Now even her earthly body is with Him in Heaven!

Granted, there are many weaknesses in this comparison, but it is a starting place for discussion. After the discussion, you can continue, “The Dormition is a good reminder for us to live holy lives and love God as the Theotokos did! We also want to live in Heaven with Him when we depart this life!”

Here is a sampling of ways that will help the whole family learn more about the Feast of the Dormition:

A [printable countdown coloring page](#) to use as an ongoing project during the days of the Dormition Fast.



Teens and adults can prepare for the Feast of the Dormition by listening to this [podcast on the theology of the feast](#), as explained by Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory.

“If we follow her example, our souls can become like hers and find everlasting rest in Christ’s hands.” (p. 59) Read more in the fascinating segment about the Feast of the Dormition in the book from Ancient Faith Publishing, [Heaven Meets Earth: Celebrating Pascha and the Twelve Great Feasts](#). Read about the Feast of the Dormition, learn more about the festal icon, and find the

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hymns of the feast in this [blog post](#). Or read more about the feast [here](#).

This [printable children's bulletin](#) includes information about the Dormition of the Theotokos and fun activities.

Listen to Dr. Chrissi Hart's [reading of The Dormition Of The Theotokos](#) from *The Twelve Great Feasts for Children* by Sister Elaine (Conciliar Press, 2004).

With older children, [study the words of this Paraklesis](#). Discuss all the names the Theotokos is given, what she is compared to, and what types she fulfilled.

[Print this pop-up centerpiece](#) to decorate your table or prayer corner for the Feast of Dormition. (Add blue accents to make the connection for young children that blue is the Liturgical color used to represent the Theotokos.)

Some children will be fascinated by [this miracle that happens annually](#) (with very few exceptions) at the time of the Dormition of the Theotokos, on the Greek

island of Cephalonia! It involves snakes and the icon of the Theotokos, and started when nuns prayed and asked the Theotokos to deliver them from pirates.

Enjoy a family-friendly guide for [observing and celebrating the Fast and Feast of Dormition](#) in the August Feast Day Guide from *Ascetic Life of Motherhood*.

Resources to support Orthodox Christian families in the Little Church are readily available across the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Education Ministry (AOCEM) platforms:

[@antiochianchristianed on Instagram](#)

[Main website](#)

[AOCEM on Pinterest](#)

[Christian Parenting blog](#)

[Orthodox Christian Parenting Facebook page](#)

Connect with DOMSE Christian Education Coordinator Anna-Sarah Farha: aodce@antiochian.org



Support Your Diocese

DONATE TO:

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- Teen SOYO
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Thank You!

SACRAMENTAL LIVING



DOMSE FALL RETREAT

ST. IGNATIUS CHURCH - FRANKLIN, TN
September 20th - 21st, 2024

For more details, visit:
domse.org/event/domse-fall-retreat-2024/



Camp St. Thekla

By Sueanna Alter | All Saints Church, Raleigh, NC



Thank God for another successful summer at Camp St. Thekla! At the end of June, we welcomed over thirty staff members who selflessly volunteered their time to come to our camp and serve our campers. Our staff was a mix of long-time campers/first time counselors, staff veterans, and even featured some young adults who were Chrismated only last Pascha. What they all had in common was a passion for service, and to give back to the community that some of them had only recently entered. We were so blessed by the efforts of these young adults; please keep them in your prayers and encourage others in your parishes to apply!

Our first session ran from June 23rd to 29th, and our second session started on June 30th and ended on July 6th. Over those two weeks, our staff served over 140 campers and facilitated all of our super fun and spiritually edifying activities. In the mornings, our campers start their day with Orthros, led by our wonderful session priests and the readers and chanters on our staff. After breakfast, the brother and sister cabins came together to learn in our Christian Education classes, or at Ask Sayedna, or do team bonding at Arts and Crafts and participate on our Ropes Course.

The afternoons were time for games and fun, as counselors facilitated gaga ball, angle ball, swimming at the pool, canoeing, and many more activities. At arts and crafts, our campers learned to make candles and how to knot prayer ropes, wonderful tools for prayer that the campers could take home with them.

After dinner and vespers, our whole camp came together in the evenings for much loved dances and parties, like our iconic Western Night and the ever-popular 4th of July themed Pool Party. We also tried out a new addition to our evening lineup with Light Up the

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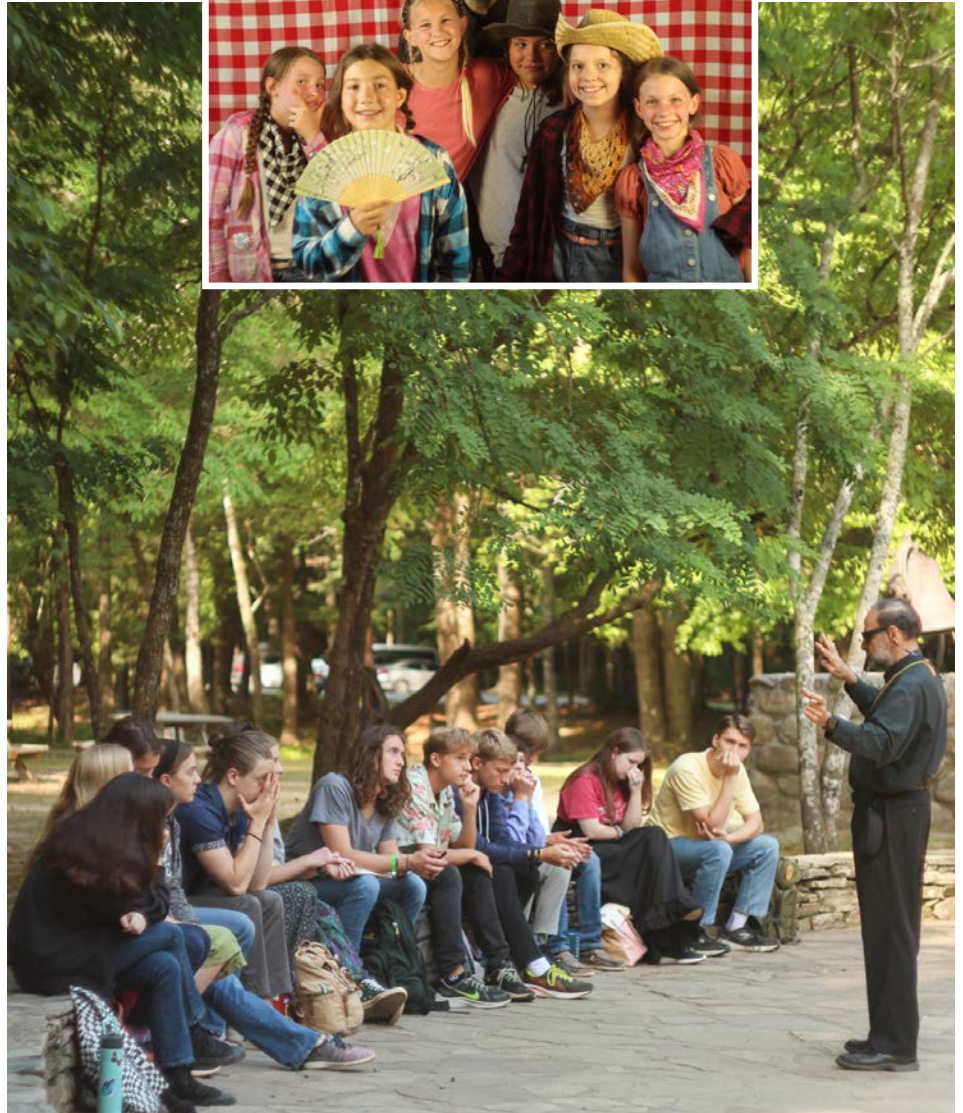
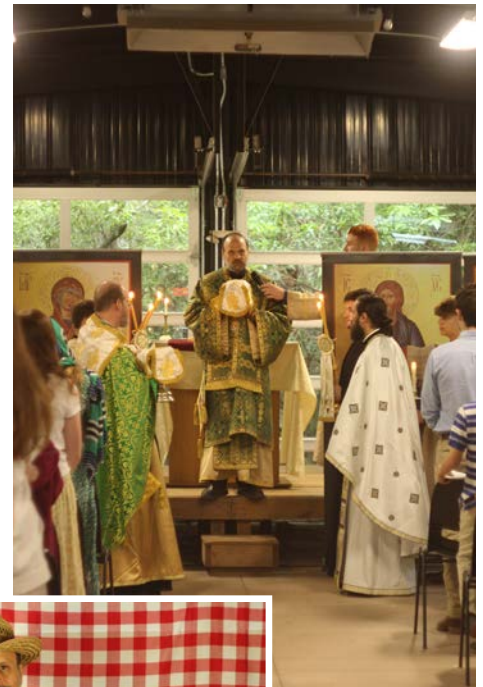
Night, a party full of neon colors, face paint, glow sticks, and black lights. The photos were amazing!

On the final night of each session, our cabins rewrote the lyrics to classic and popular songs to be about camp and performed them together at Serenade Night. This is always a great way to end camp, as it shows the creativity and unity of our cabins and allows them to express how much camp has meant to them for that fun-filled week.

We were very blessed to have His Grace Bishop Nicholas at camp for all two weeks. He provided invaluable leadership and spiritual guidance to the many staff and campers who requested private audiences with him and spent countless hours hosting co-ed cabin times and discussing deep spiritual questions at Ask Sayedna. We are so grateful to have a shepherd who is unafraid to confront the issues facing the youth of our diocese, and to speak plainly with them about what the church teaches. Camp is a place for many young people to reaffirm and deepen their faith, and that is thanks to Bishop Nicholas' tireless efforts to get to know them and strengthen them.

As it has been said many times before, God loves camp. It is only by His Grace that we are able to hold camp, despite the many financial and logistical hardships that present themselves each year. God inspires our clergy, our volunteers and staff, and our campers to overcome every challenge and put together this beautiful experience. The Lord has had mercy on us!

Please keep us in your prayers as we start planning Summer Camp 2025!





Words from Sayedna Nicholas

It is traditional in the Orthodox Church to exhume the bodies of saints and place them in reliquaries for veneration. For this reason, on July 18, the grave of St. Raphael at the Antiochian Village was opened, and his body was exhumed among five other bodies that are listed on the tomb stone. St. Raphael's body was shrouded with a mantiya, his head was crowned with a miter, and his chest was adorned with a small gold cross bearing his name. After his bones were removed from the worn-out casket, every bone found was washed three times. Metropolitan SABA, Bishop THOMAS, Bishop JOHN, and Bishop NICHOLAS processed St. Raphael's body from the tomb area to St. Ignatius church at the Antiochian Village camp. The procession was accompanied by present clergy, a byzantine choir, campers, camp staff, and other faithful. This undertaking is a once in a lifetime experience that some have been blessed to have throughout Orthodox Church history. May God raise more saints in our church for His glory.



May God bless you
and may the Holy
Trinity protect
you all!

+BISHOP NICHOLAS



Theology Editor's Corner

A brother priest recently shared with me a letter from St. Justin Popovich that has been posted to the [Patristic Faith blog by Fr. Zechariah Lynch](#). The letter is a powerful encouragement for any of us who are tempted to give in to despair when our life in the world seems too hard. St. Justin says,

Dear Father. Joy to you from the Lord! Joy in every sorrow, in every misfortune, in every death for His sake. For in this sad world there is no true joy outside of Him. How many times, without any doubt, has He, the All-merciful One, descended into my very hell and expelled me from my most terrible death, from my dying. He has probably done this for you many times. And He has poured wonderful joy over my soul and yours. So always and everywhere in the human world, He manages to help us and comes to us with His Divine truth, Divine righteousness, Divine joy. And then who is richer than we!...

There is no place for despair for a Christian on earth, because when the Lord descended into this world and then by the Church remained fully in it, how then can you give way to despair in your soul? After all, the whole Lord is here, next to us, in the midst of us! Just cry out to Him and, look – you are already all in His arms. And then who can take you out of His hand – what enemy, what man, what devil, what hell? Yes, no force, no force of evil can separate us from His love. To them we are always stronger than any evil, any sin, any hell, any demon, and all of them combined. The whole wisdom of a Christian consists in the following: to hold on unceasingly to the Lord Jesus Christ, to hold on by prayer, to hold on by fasting, to hold on by alms, to hold on by love, to hold on by meekness, to hold on by humility, to hold on by patience, to hold on by repentance, to hold on by Holy Communion, to hold on by holy confession – by all this to hold on to Him, God and the Lord unchangeable, irreplaceable by nothing and no one – by every Holy Sacrament and every holy act pleasing to God. And then what? – Then over all deaths, over all torments, you will always triumph with joy: the joy of faith, the joy of salvation...

The main thing is, by faith, prayer, and love, fall down to the Wonderful Lord, the Sweetest Lord, and all deaths will flee from you, and even more so despair and his offspring.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said that He is with us always, even to the end of the world (Mat. 28:20). And when we put our trust in Him moment by moment, He enters into our personal hell in order to raise us up and grant us life, peace, and joy. May we all trust in Christ the Light who shines in our darkened souls and who is never overcome by our circumstances!

Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER

DOMSE FALL RETREAT 2024

September 20 - 21, 2024
St. Ignatius Orthodox Church
Franklin, TN - In person
[CLICK HERE FOR INFO!](#)

NOVEMBER

ANNUAL AMEN FALL RETREAT 2024

November 16, 2024
10:00 am - 1:00 pm EST - Virtual
[CLICK HERE FOR INFO!](#)

2025

JANUARY

DOMSE CLERGY & WINTER RETREATS 2025

January 29 - February 1, 2025
St. Elias Orthodox Church
Atlanta, GA - In person
Details to come!

JUNE

DOMSE 2025 PARISH LIFE CONFERENCE (PLC)

June 11 - 14, 2025
St. George Orthodox Church
Jacksonville, FL - In person
Details to come!

NOVEMBER

AMEN CONFERENCE & RETREAT 2025

November 5 - 8, 2025
Woodland Christian Camp & Retreat Center
Temple, GA - In person
Details to come!

IF YOU HAVE ARTICLES OR SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LIGHT NEWSLETTER, PLEASE EMAIL THEM TO

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