

the Light



JULY/AUGUST 2025
NEWSLETTER

DOMSE FALL RETREAT 2025

September 19 - 20, 2025

In person

St. Ignatius Orthodox Church, Franklin, TN

Details to come!

AMEN CONFERENCE & RETREAT 2025

November 5 - 8, 2025

In person

Woodland Christian Camp & Retreat

Center, Temple, GA - Details to come!

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SPECIAL EDITION

DOMSE PLC 2025

St. George Orthodox Church | Jacksonville, FL



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Parish Life Conference 2025

A Joyful Gathering of the Faithful



Sh. Shell Keim
All Saints Orthodox Church, Raleigh, NC

The Parish Life Conference 2025 is in the books—and it was a resounding success! The faithful of the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast (DOMSE) gathered in Jacksonville, Florida, for several days of fellowship, competition, prayer, and the business of the Diocese and its affiliated organizations. We were warmly and graciously hosted by Fr. Kamal Al-Rahil and the parishioners of St. George Orthodox Church in Jacksonville, whose hospitality was a blessing to all.

Although our beloved Bishop Nicholas was unable to attend due to his recovery from recent heart surgery, we were honored to have His Grace Bishop Thomas preside over the liturgical services and conference proceedings. While Sayedna Nicholas was deeply missed, the Diocese ran like a well-oiled machine—a testament to his leadership and the dedication of all those who serve. We extend heartfelt thanks to the many individuals who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the conference's smooth operation.

The organizations of DOMSE came together to foster spiritual growth, strengthen fellowship and perform their respective duties. The Antiochian Women elected a new executive board, led by Elizabeth Baclic of St. Nicholas Church in Springdale, AR, who will serve as President. The Antiochian Men will retain their current executive board until their elections at next year's PLC. Nora Baca of St. Ignatius Church in Franklin, TN, was elected President of our diocesan SOYO board. We thank all who have offered their time, talent, and energy to serve the faithful through these vital ministries.

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**CLICK HERE FOR THE
PLC CREATIVE ARTS
FESTIVAL VIDEO OF
ALL ENTRANTS.**

As always, the Bible Bowl was a highlight of the conference, combining serious study with great fun. St. Stephen Church in Hiram, GA successfully defended their titles in both the teen and adult divisions. We look forward to cheering them on as they represent DOMSE at the National Bible Bowl in Chicago this summer.

The Oratorical Festival highlighted the eloquence and thoughtfulness of our youth. Each participant offered a powerful witness through their prepared speeches. Congratulations to Katie Baclig of St. Nicholas Church in Springdale, AR, this year's Junior Division winner, and to Sophia Griffith of All Saints Church in Raleigh, NC, the winner of the Senior Division. Sophia will go on to represent our Diocese in the national competition in Chicago, and she carries with her our prayers and encouragement. His Grace Bishop Thomas also had the joy of inducting several new members into the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. We give thanks for all who serve the Church through this vital ministry and for the many charitable works the Order supports.

The General Assembly met to conduct the formal business of the Diocese, and the Diocesan Ministry Council extended its deep appreciation to this year's DOMSE Service Award Recipient, Sueanna Alter of All Saints Church in Raleigh. As Administrative Director of Camp St. Thekla, Sueanna has played

a central role in supporting one of the most cherished ministries of our Diocese. We are profoundly grateful to her and to all who make Camp St. Thekla such a formative experience for our young people. Teen SOYO enjoyed a special time of fellowship and recreation at St. George Church in Jacksonville, including basketball and other activities designed to nurture friendships that we pray will last a lifetime.

To all who contributed to the success of the 2025 Parish Life Conference—Fr. Kamal and the rest of the St. George community, choir directors, chanters ministry leaders, volunteers, and the many faithful who brought joy and energy to every aspect of the gathering—we offer our sincere thanks. Your efforts are deeply appreciated and are an integral part of the life of our diocesan family.

Mark your calendars now for PLC 2026, when we will gather again—this time in the beautiful Ozarks, hosted by St. Nicholas Church in Springdale, Arkansas. We look forward to seeing you there!



Clergy Spotlight

Fr. Herman Lasseter



Fr. Herman Lasseter was born and raised right outside of Jackson, Mississippi. After high school, he attended community college and then landed his first job with the Madison County Sheriff's office. Shortly thereafter, he was hired by the City of Brandon Police Department and went to the Police Academy. His final law enforcement job was with Mississippi Probation and Parole. He was raised in a Christian home and grew up in a non-denominational church. As a young adult he was introduced to the Orthodox Church. It was everything he didn't know he had been missing. He knew where he belonged and was catechized in 2009 at St. Peter Antiochian Orthodox Church, the same year he and Khouria Nikki were married.

Kh. Nikki, too, was raised in a Protestant church but the more she attended both the Protestant Church and the Orthodox Church, the more she felt called to Orthodoxy. It wasn't only the beauty that called to her, but the community and the fullness that she hadn't felt anywhere else. She became a catechumen and shortly after their first son was born, she was catechized into the Church.

Fr. Herman felt called to the priesthood around 2014 and considering they were both settled in their careers and couldn't easily uproot and move to seminary, he put it on the backburner. He continued to finish his bachelor's degree and even underwent a career

change, but with much prayer, still felt called to ministry. It was in 2017 when they decided that they would submit to the Lord and if it was His will, they would follow.

That same year, Fr. Herman was approved to go to Seminary and was accepted to Hellenic College Holy Cross in Boston, Massachusetts. They moved shortly after the birth of their second son, and he began his studies. Fr. Herman received his Master of Divinity and finished seminary during the height of Covid in 2020. That year, a lot was uncertain, but they still had faith the Lord would see them through. In August of that year, he was assigned to St. Stephen Church in Hiram, Georgia and two months later they welcomed their third son.

A year later, he was assigned Proistamenos to St. Peter's in Madison, Mississippi, where he has been serving for the last four years. By the grace of God, the parish is thriving, growing, and continues to be a vibrant parish within the Diocese of the Miami and the Southeast. Fr. Herman and his family live on seven acres and have a garden, cows, sheep, and chickens. Khouria homeschools the boys and works part-time; they enjoy traveling, camping, and hiking when they can pull away from the homestead. In Father's (very little) spare time, he enjoys archeology and history.





Camp St. Thekla

By Sueanna Alter | All Saints Church, Raleigh, NC



Greetings in Christ!

Camp Saint Thekla 2025 is officially in the books. Thank you all for your support and prayers during the past two and one-half weeks. This summer we served over 140 campers each session, a completely full camp! Each session had a lengthy waiting list, so be sure to lookout for registration for next summer and sign up before the rush.

Like every year, our campers experienced a week of Orthodox immersion, with services every morning and evening, prayers before and after every meal, and Christian Education classes every morning. This year the curriculum supplied to the Archdiocese camps focused on the life of the Theotokos and the feasts of the church that commemorate the most important moments of her life. Our campers learned that the Theotokos is a model of the obedience and holiness that we are all striving for, and our camp was a clinic in developing those virtues.

When our campers aren't in church, they're playing Gaga Ball and 4 Square, climbing the high ropes obstacles, cooling off poolside, or hiking through the creek. The whole camp came together for our evening programs, including line dancing at western night, playing in a Gaga Ball tournament during game night, and singing serenade songs on our last night. S'mores were enjoyed by all campers, but our oldest campers got to make their own dinners by the campfire and sleep out under the stars on our Overnight.

We dearly missed our beloved Bishop Nicholas, but his prayers and spirit were with us and he was consulted often for guidance. He was also in our prayers and we are hoping for a speedy recovery and to see him and all our campers and staff back for summer 2026!





Update on Sayedna Nicholas

We extend heartfelt gratitude to the entire DOMSE family for the outpouring of love you have shown His Grace Bishop Nicholas – your prayers, calls, messages, and countless thoughtful acts have surrounded him with comfort and strength.

In late May, Sayedna's physicians discovered a cardiac issue that required immediate attention. Within hours, he underwent an urgent yet remarkably smooth procedure, and the surgical team reports that everything unfolded exactly as planned. Over the past six weeks he has faithfully followed his doctors' instructions, balancing much-needed rest with light pastoral duties, and his care team expects a complete recovery in the near future.

Bishop Nicholas remains deeply moved by your kindness and assures us that each note and prayer has lifted his spirits. As he finishes this brief detour through the world of cardiac care, please continue to remember him in your prayers so that, strengthened in body and soul, he may soon return to the full rhythm of episcopal ministry.

Glory to God
for all things!

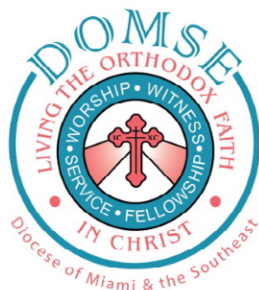
DOMSE DMC



Save the Dates!

2025, 2026, & 2027 Event List

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
2025		
September 19 – 20, 2025	Fall Retreat 2025	St. Ignatius (Franklin, TN)
November 5 – 8, 2025	AMEN Conference & Retreat 2025	Woodland Camp (Temple, GA)
2026		
January 28 – January 31, 2026	Clergy & Winter Retreats 2026	St. Elias (Atlanta, GA)
February 14 – 16, 2026	Camp St. Thekla Winter Camp 2026	TBD
March 21, 2026	AMEN Lenten Retreat	Virtual
March 21, 2026	YAM Lenten Retreat	Virtual
March 28, 2026	Antiochian Women Lenten Retreat	Virtual
March 28, 2026	SOYO Lenten Retreat	Virtual
June 1 – July 1, 2026	2025 DOMSE Scholarship	Virtual
June 10 – June 13, 2026	Parish Life Conference 2026	St. Nicholas Church (Springdale, AR)
June 22 – June 28, 2026	Camp St. Thekla Summer Camp Session 1	TBD
June 29 - July 5, 2026	Camp St. Thekla Summer Camp Session 2	
September 18 – 19, 2026	Fall Retreat 2026	St. Ignatius (Franklin, TN)
November TBD, 2026	AMEN Conference & Retreat 2026	TBD
2027		
January 27 – January 30, 2027	Clergy & Winter Retreats 2027	St. Elias (Atlanta, GA)
February 13 – 15, 2027	Camp St. Thekla Winter Camp 2027	TBD
TBD, 2027	AMEN Lenten Retreat	Virtual
TBD, 2027	Antiochian Women Lenten Retreat	Virtual
TBD, 2027	SOYO Lenten Retreat	Virtual
TBD, 2027	YAM Lenten Retreat	Virtual
June 1 – July 1, 2027	2025 DOMSE Scholarship	Virtual
June 9 – June 12, 2027	Parish Life Conference 2027	TBD
June 21 – June 27, 2027	Camp St. Thekla Summer Camp Session 1	TBD
June 28 - July 4, 2027	Camp St. Thekla Summer Camp Session 2	
September 17 – 18, 2027	Fall Retreat 2027	St. Ignatius (Franklin, TN)
November TBD, 2027	AMEN Conference & Retreat 2027	TBD



Clergy & Winter Retreats = Always the last weekend of January
 Camp St. Thekla Winter Camp = Always President's Day weekend
 Parish Life Conference = Always the 2nd weekend of June
 Camp St. Thekla Summer Camp = Always the last 2 weekends of June
 Fall Retreat = Always the 3rd weekend of September



Theology Editor's Corner

This year, for the first time, we celebrated the Feast of All Saints of Antioch on the second Sunday after Pentecost – June 22nd, 2025. Some within our Archdiocese were sad that we did not also celebrate All Saints of North America along with our Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters here in America and Canada. But the tragic bombing of St. Elias Church in Dweilaa, Damascus, Syria on the very Sunday of All Saints of Antioch was a stark reminder of just how much we owe to the testimony and witness of the Antiochian saints and martyrs who have preserved the faith from the time of the apostles down to our own day and age. Our father, His Eminence Metropolitan SABA delivered a homily commemorating the twenty-five faithful who died that day, including some who were his own spiritual children in the Archdiocese of Hauran, and his words are a powerful reminder that each one of us are called to be ready for martyrdom, and that God will be with us through everything if we will only follow Him to the end. He says,

Shall we say we have grown familiar with martyrdom? Yes, it is a blessing to become a martyr, but we do not seek it of our own accord. If it comes, we receive it with strength and courage, armed with the word of the Gospel. The Lord spoke thus: When they bring you before governors and councils—meaning when they persecute you—do not worry or be afraid or think about what you will say, for you will be given what to say (Matthew 10:17-20).

This means, dear friends, that we do not fear death, because we are children of life. We believe firmly that the life given to us is completed in the eternal life that begins after this earthly one, in the light of God that never fades. In death, we pass into life.

Our Lord also told us that the time will come when those who kill you will think they are offering a sacrifice to God (John 16:2). From the beginning of

Christianity, there have been persecutions. We do not wish that any of our fellow citizens stand before God accused of murder, but if God wills that we are martyred, we are ready. We do not fear martyrdom.

Last Sunday, three heroic men threw themselves onto the suicide bomber to lessen the impact of the explosion. Many died and many were injured. But had these three not thrown themselves on him, far more people would have been killed and wounded. They did not fear death, but offered themselves as a sacrifice, just as our Lord Jesus Christ did.

These three young men were all from the same family, from a village renowned for preserving its Christian faith. In that village, in 2014, two boys, no older than 14 or 15, were kidnapped. After mediation, we were able to bring them back the next day. One of them told me they were severely tortured and burned with cigarettes to make them renounce Christ. He showed me his back, completely burned. They were trembling with fear, but they still refused. Children, by the United Nations' definition.

Finally, they were placed in a wooden box resembling a coffin, with a large knife placed at their necks, and were threatened with slaughter if they did not deny Christ. One of the boys told me: "Sayidna, I don't know where the strength came from. I forgot fear. I felt ready to face them alone. I told them forcefully: Even if you kill me, torture me, slaughter me, I will not deny Christ. I was born a Christian and I will die a Christian."

I opened the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 10, and read him the passage I shared with you earlier. He began to cry. He hadn't known those verses, and said: "That's exactly what happened to me."

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This is only one of countless testimonies of martyrs for the past 2,000 years, across the globe. That is why we do not fear. We do not choose martyrdom or go after it, but if it comes, we are not afraid. We believe that the Lord will be with us in that hour and will strengthen us.

God is glorious in His saints! It was God Himself who strengthened the two boys to trust in Christ in the face of kidnapping, torture, and possible death. And He also gave the three men the courage to throw themselves on the suicide bomber to try to protect everyone else in St. Elias Church. Finally, He empowered the whole community of St. Elias to come to the church again just one day after the bombing to sing out together – “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life” – and to show that they are not afraid of death. The powerful witness of our Syrian brothers and sisters gives us the confidence to patiently live out the same Orthodox Christian faith here in America even where there are far fewer external dangers. May God grant peace and strength to everyone who continues to suffer in the Middle East and have mercy on us through the prayers of all the saints of Antioch and the new martyrs of Damascus!

His Eminence's full homily can be accessed on the Archdiocesan website at: <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2476>

Donations can be made to support the survivors and surviving family members of the bombing through the Archdiocese's "2025 Prophet Elias Church of Damascus, Syria Relief Fund" at: <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2481>

Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER

DOMSE FALL RETREAT 2025

September 19 - 20, 2025

In person

St. Ignatius Orthodox Church, Franklin, TN

Details to come!

NOVEMBER

AMEN CONFERENCE & RETREAT 2025

November 5 - 8, 2025

In person

Woodland Christian Camp & Retreat Center, Temple, GA - Details to come!

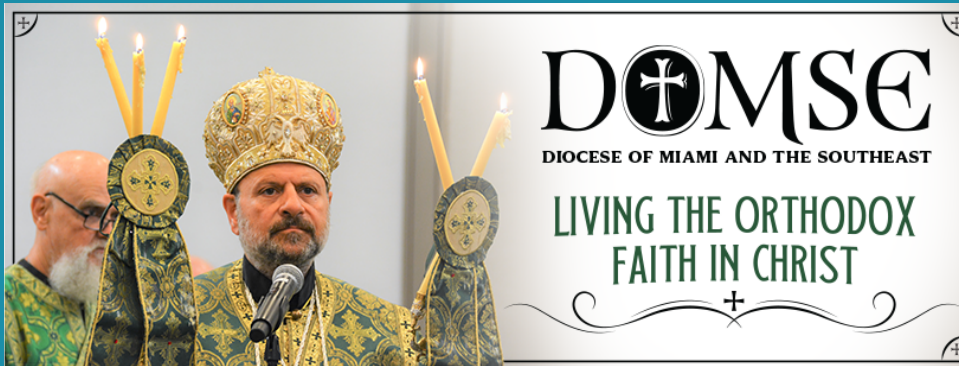
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Antiochian Men | Antiochian Women
Young Adult Fellowship | Teen SOYO
or a General Donation

Thank You!



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SUGGESTIONS FOR
THE LIGHT NEWSLETTER,
PLEASE EMAIL THEM TO

DOMSENEWSLETTER@GMAIL.COM

Fr. Nathaniel Trembley, Theology Editor
Deborah Abdo, Editor and Manager
Chelsea Beazley, Graphic Designer
Sh. Shell Keim
Bishop Nicholas