

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesday: Moleben to the
Theotokos 6 AM**

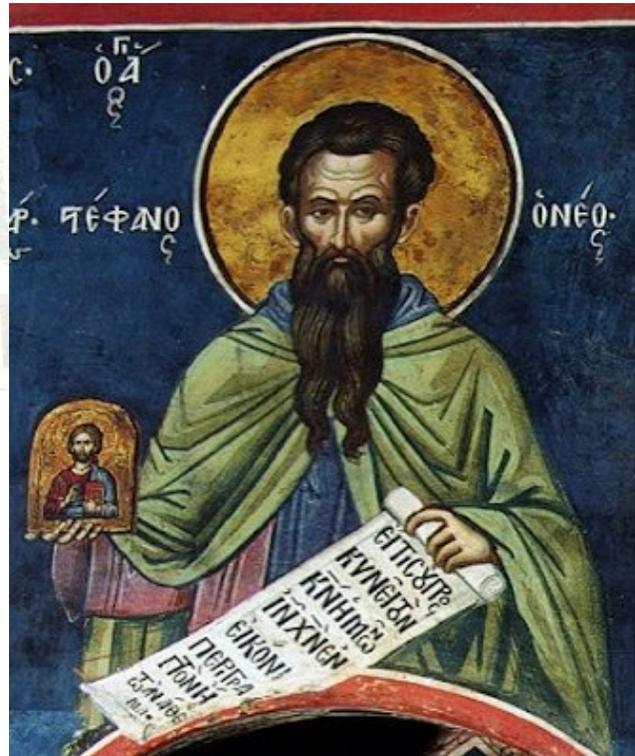
Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



November 28, 2021 – 23rd Sunday After Pentecost Venerable Monk-martyr Stephen the New

The Monk Martyr and Confessor Stephen the New was born in 715 at Constantinople into a pious Christian family. His parents, having two daughters, prayed the Lord for a son. The mother of the new-born Stephen took him to the Blachernae church of the Most Holy Theotokos and dedicated him to God.

During the reign of the emperor Leo the Isaurian (716-741) there was a persecution against the holy icons and against those venerating them. With the support of the emperor, the adherents of the Iconoclast heresy seized control of the supreme positions of authority in the Empire and in the Church. Persecuted by the powers of this world, Orthodoxy was preserved in monasteries far from the capital, in solitary cells, and in the brave and faithful hearts of its followers.

The Orthodox parents of Saint Stephen, grieved by the prevailing impiety, fled from Constantinople to Bithynia, and they gave over their sixteen-year-old son in obedience to the monk John, who labored in asceticism in a solitary place on the Mount of Saint Auxentius. Saint Stephen dwelt with the venerable monk John for more than fifteen years, devoting himself totally to this spirit-bearing Elder, and

learning monastic activity from him. Here Stephen received the news that his father was dead, and his mother and sisters had been tonsured as nuns.

After a certain time his teacher John also died. With deep sorrow Saint Stephen buried his venerable body, and continued with monastic effort in his cave by himself. Soon monks began to come to the ascetic, desiring to learn from him the virtuous and salvific life, and a monastery was established, with Saint Stephen as the igumen. At forty-two years of age Stephen left the monastery he founded, and he went to another mountain, on whose summit he dwelt in deep seclusion in a solitary cell. But here also a community of monks soon gathered, seeking the spiritual guidance of Saint Stephen.

Leo the Isaurian was succeeded by Constantine Copronymos (741-775), a fiercer persecutor of the Orthodox, and an even more zealous iconoclast. The emperor convened an Iconoclast Council, attended by 358 bishops from the Eastern provinces. However, except for Constantine, the Archbishop of Constantinople, illegitimately raised to the patriarchal throne by the power of Copronymos, not one of the other patriarchs participated in the wicked doings of this Council, thus making it less likely to style itself as "ecumenical." This council of heretics, at the instigation of the emperor and the archbishop, described icons as idols, and pronounced an anathema on all who venerated icons in the Orthodox manner, and it described icon veneration as heresy.

Meanwhile, the monastery of Mount Auxentius and its igumen became known in the capital. They told the emperor about the ascetic life of the monks, about their Orthodox piety, about the igumen Stephen's gift of wonderworking, and of how Saint Stephen's fame had spread far beyond the region of the monastery, and that the name of its head was accorded universal respect and love. The saint's open encouragement of icon veneration and the implied rebuff to the persecutors of Orthodoxy within the monastery of Mount Auxentius especially angered the emperor. Archbishop Constantine realized that in the person of Saint Stephen he had a strong and implacable opponent of his iconoclastic intentions, and he plotted how he might draw him over to his side or else destroy him.

They tried to lure Saint Stephen into the Iconoclast camp, at first with flattery and bribery, then by threats, but in vain. Then they slandered the saint, accusing him of falling into sin with the nun Anna. Saint Anna was a noblewoman who sold all her possessions and gave the money to the poor. She received the monastic tonsure from Saint Stephen the New while he was living on Mount Auxentius in Bithynia. He sent her to live in the women's monastery called Trichinarion (Community of hairshirt-wearers).

When the iconoclasts tried to turn Saint Stephen from venerating the holy icons, they tried flattery, bribery, and threats, but all their efforts were in vain. Then they accused him of visiting the Trichinarion Monastery at night and falling into sin with the nun Anna. Although her own maidservant testified against her (she was promised her freedom and marriage to a nobleman if she did), Saint Anna denied any guilt.

The emperor's soldiers came to the monastery and seized Saint Anna and brought her before him, but she refused to lie about Saint Stephen. Therefore Emperor Constantine threw her into a dungeon in Constantinople.

The next morning the emperor sat in a public building with an assembled crowd, and had Saint Anna brought to his presence. Since she insisted that both she and Saint Stephen were innocent, the emperor had her stripped naked in the sight of all. During her interrogation, she remained silent. Meanwhile, her maidservant falsely swore that Saint Stephen had sinned with her mistress.

Angered by her refusal to speak, the emperor had Saint Anna stretched out on the ground, where soldiers beat her with rods. During this torment, she said, "I have never sinned with Stephen. Lord, have mercy." The soldiers continued to beat her until she was almost dead.

The emperor returned to his palace, leaving orders that Saint Anna be imprisoned in one of the city's abandoned monasteries. There she departed to the Lord, receiving from Him the twin crowns of virginity and martyrdom.

Finally, the emperor gave orders to lock up Saint Stephen in prison, and to destroy his monastery. Iconoclast bishops were sent to the saint in prison, trying to persuade him of the dogmatic correctness of the Iconoclast position. But the saint easily refuted all the arguments of the heretics and he remained true to Orthodoxy.

Then the emperor ordered that the saint be exiled on one of the islands in the Sea of Marmora. Saint Stephen settled into a cave, and there also his disciples soon gathered. After a certain while the saint left the brethren and took upon himself the exploit of living atop a pillar. News of the stylite Stephen, and the miracles worked by his prayers, spread throughout all the Empire and strengthened the faith and spirit of Orthodoxy in the people.

The emperor gave orders to transfer Saint Stephen to prison on the island of Pharos, and then to bring him to trial. At the trial, the saint refuted the arguments of the heretics sitting in judgment upon him. He explained the dogmatic essence of icon veneration, and he denounced the Iconoclasts because in blaspheming icons, they blasphemed Christ and the Mother of God. As proof, the saint pointed to a golden coin inscribed with the image of the emperor. He asked the judges what

would happen to a man who threw the coin to the ground , and then trampled the emperor's image under his feet. They replied that such a man would certainly be punished for dishonoring the image of the emperor. The saint said that an even greater punishment awaited anyone who would dishonor the image of the King of Heaven and His Saints, and with that he spat on the coin, threw it to the ground, and began to trample it underfoot.

The emperor gave orders to take the saint to prison, where already there were languishing 342 Elders, condemned for the veneration of icons. In this prison Saint Stephen spent eleven months, consoling the imprisoned. The prison became like a monastery, where the usual prayers and hymns were chanted according to the Typikon. The people came to the prison in crowds and asked Saint Stephen to pray for them.

When the emperor learned that the saint had organized a monastery in prison, where they prayed and venerated holy icons, he sent two of his own servants, twin-brothers, to beat the saint to death. When these brothers went to the prison and beheld the face of the monk shining with a divine light, they fell down on their knees before him, asking his forgiveness and prayers, then they told the emperor that his command had been carried out. But the emperor learned the truth and he resorted to yet another lie. Informing his soldiers that the saint was plotting to remove him from the throne, he sent them to the prison. The holy confessor himself came out to the furious soldiers, who seized him and dragged him through the streets of the city. They then threw the lacerated body of the martyr into a pit, where they were wont to bury criminals.

On the following morning a fiery cloud appeared over Mount Auxentius, and then a heavy darkness descended upon the capital, accompanied by hail, which killed many people.

The Holy Martyrs Stephen, Basil, Gregory, another Gregory, John, Andrew, Peter, and many others suffered for the veneration of holy icons with the Monk Martyr Stephen the New, with whom they languished together in prison. After his martyric death, they were executed. (*adapted from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:4-10

Brethren, God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the

gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 13:10-17

At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise *herself* up. But when Jesus saw her, He called *her* to *Him* and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” And He laid *His* hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, “There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.” The Lord then answered him and said, “Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead *it* away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

I sincerely and without any hesitation, agreeing to the sentiments of the letters now read from the Pope of Old Rome and to the declaration of our most holy Patriarch Tarasius, do avow and confess that so I think, both concerning the Orthodox faith and also concerning holy images: not as if I now admitted some new dogma or recent invention, but as having accurately ascertained the tradition about them, to be both of the holy Apostles and divine Teachers who left them to the Church of God. Wherefore, with my whole heart, I receive those same venerable images with honor befitting and the worship of salutation. And those who differ or oppose, or teach anything contrary to holy images, esteeming them as aliens from the Catholic Church, I reject them and denounce them as heretics. - Heiromartyr Euthymius, Bishop of Sardis, at the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Also Commemorated Today: Martyr Irenarchus

The Holy Martyr Irenarchus was from Sebaste, Armenia, and lived during the reign of Diocletian (284-305). When he was young, he would minister to the martyrs in prison after they were tortured. He once saw seven women being tortured for Christ, who bravely endured their torments. Saint Irenarchus marveled at this because they showed great courage in standing up to the tyrant, even though they were weak by nature.

Illumined by divine grace, Saint Irenarchus confessed Christ. First he endured trials by fire and water, then he was beheaded with the seven holy women in the year 303. (*from oca.org*)

News from Jesse and Juanita Brandow

Dear friends, Blessed Nativity Fast! And for those in the USA, happy Thanksgiving! Amidst the holidays, here's some news from us in Central America.

What's New

Juanita started her hospital rotations

During the pandemic, Juanita's university suspended in-person hospital work for medical students, which delayed the start of her hospital rotations. However, this summer Juanita finally was allowed to start working with patients! Her hospital rotations last for three years and every month she works in a different speciality. Since July, she has worked in cardiology, emergency medicine, hematology/oncology, and neurology (her favorite area so far).

We moved to Guatemala City

When medical students begin their hospital rotations in Guatemala, their university will assign them to any of a variety of hospitals in different regions of the country. This year Juanita was assigned to the Hospital San Juan de Dios in Guatemala City, which has over 1,000 beds and is one of the two largest hospitals in the country. She will be stationed in Guatemala City until at least June of 2022 when updated assignments will be given. As a result, we have moved from the city of Huehuetenango to Guatemala City, where we now live in a secure apartment at the heart of Zone 1, the historic city center.

My new work is progressing

As I shared in [our previous update](#), this year I began working directly under our hierarch—His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Mexico—to develop educational resources for evangelism and outreach. Although I continue to be based out of Guatemala, my new work is for the benefit of the Metropolis of Mexico as a whole. The most important task I have been given is to develop an educational program to train local laypeople from Latin America to do outreach within our Metropolis. This outreach-training program is something I'm developing from scratch, and the curriculum development process is something I've been able to do "remotely," so to speak, while we live in Guatemala City. These are some of the areas of progress I've made over the past months:

- I determined the overall structure of the program, which includes three teaching phases: (1) The Orthodox Faith, (2) Orthodox Prayer, (3) Orthodox Mission. As you can see, the program begins with topics that normally would be covered in basic catechesis before someone is received into the

Church, namely: Orthodox faith and Orthodox prayer. These are included in the outreach-training program because the majority of faithful in our Metropolis are recent converts and many still need to complete their basic formation in the faith. Before they can effectively engage in outreach, they need to strengthen their foundations.

- I submitted my full program plan to His Eminence Athenagoras and received his blessing to begin writing the lesson plans and textbooks.
- I have now completed two of the books that will be used for the first phase, *The Orthodox Faith*.

Prayer Requests

For our safety in Guatemala City

Those who have visited Guatemala might know that Zone 1 is a little rough around the edges. During the daytime, we feel safe doing errands and visiting the wonderful central market where we buy all our fresh fruit and veggies (and even whole chickens!). However, by 4 or 5pm we lock ourselves inside our secure apartment because at nighttime it's not uncommon to hear gunshots. We would be grateful for prayers for our safety as we live and move about in the capital city. We trust in God and His will for our lives, each and every day.

For fortitude for Juanita in her hospital work

Juanita loves the connections she is forming with patients, but the hospital rotations as a whole have been extraordinarily difficult. Without sharing the grueling details, I can say that hospital rotations here in Guatemala are even more challenging than what I've heard of in the USA. The pressure on students is simply inhuman. Please pray for Juanita's fortitude during these challenges.

Final Word

I want to thank everyone for sticking with us through your prayers and support, even as we enter a more fluid and unpredictable phase of our life over the next few years. I say "unpredictable" because Juanita's three years of hospital rotations might send us bouncing around the country to different healthcare systems depending on the changing hospital assignments she will receive from her university. In addition, my work under the Metropolis of Mexico is still just beginning and I don't know exactly where I will be teaching my lesson plans once the curriculum is finished. Many of the details about my new position are fuzzy.

Despite this unpredictability, our underlying goal remains clear. We are dedicated to serving the Church in Central America using our respective talents (medical, educational, and spiritual), wherever and however God leads us. Thank you so

much for continuing to partner with us in that mission! We're excited to keep you posted on how things go moving forward!

We send our best wishes for a beautiful Nativity season, full of joy in our newborn Savior. In advance, merry Christmas! Christ is born!

In Christ,
Jesse & Juanita

Social Team for December 5

Team 3 is up next week – Edgington, Kish, Barzykin, R&C Wright. Thank you!



December Anniversaries and Birthdays

Anniversaries:

Ramius & Anna Connour 1st

Birthdays:

Victor Barzykin 1st

Tatyana Chumak 8th

William Howl 14th

Tina Harris 26th

Katrina Robinson 2nd

Andrew Dewey 11th

Gabriela Howl 14th

James Stiver 27th

Luke Cooper 5th

Jocelyn Gray 12th

AJ McNeil 16th



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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Sandy Tucker, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)