PA Department of Education Authorizes Seminary to Grant Degrees

"I believe that God has special plans for the seminary ..."

(Very Reverend Archpriest) John G. Petro, Rector of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary

The Byzantine Catholic Seminary of SS. Cyril and Methodius received great news during the Paschal celebration of Bright Week. On 22 April 2003, the Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Vicki L. Phillips, sent a letter granting authority for the seminary to "operate as a degree-granting seminary...with degree-granting privileges...to confer the following degrees: Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Master of Arts in Theology (M.A.T.).""

"It was a joyful and humbling moment for me," said Fr. John. "It was the result of much hard work by many talented and dedicated people – staff, faculty, students, members of our Advisory Board and others."

When the seminary Advisory Board was formed in 1999, it challenged Fr. John, the faculty and staff to work for the accreditation of the seminary.

"Now, three years and three months after that challenge," said Dr. Betty Radvak-Shovlin, the Board's first and only president, "we have received authorization from the state and are ready to seek accreditation from The Association of Theological Schools (ATS)."

"We had so much work to do," Fr. John said about the authorization process. "It would have been impossible without people like Betty and Fr. Jack Custer" (Dean of the seminary).

"Fr. Jack was the principal author of the catalogues and handbooks, to say nothing of his bringing the institution onto an academic level that is comparable to other seminaries."

"The final document that was sent to the PDE," said Sr. Margaret Ann Andrako, administrative assistant at the seminary who did much of the behind the scenes work on the application, "weighed 24 pounds!"

The application was followed by a four-day site visit from the PDE in October 2002. The implications of the authorization for the seminary are significant. The seminary may now seek accreditation by ATS. Current students may achieve a master's degree from the seminary. No longer will the Directors of Vocations have to tell people that the seminary cannot offer an advanced degree. And, the seminary will eventually be able to approach foundations that insist on supporting only accredited organizations.

The seminary will maintain its recently developed relationship with Duquesne University and will proceed along a vision shared by Fr. John and many people – a Byzantine Center of Learning.

"Foremost in our success has been the support of Metropolitan Basil, and before him the late Metropolitan Judson," said Fr. John. "Our Advisory Board has been enthusiastic and observant, challenging us and holding us accountable. And, our benefactors have been loyal and generous; without them we could not have moved an inch along this path."
New Deacon Formation Class Begins

The word “deacon” comes from a Greek word meaning “servant.” The men, who would become deacons in the Byzantine Catholic Church, and their wives, know this and accept it readily.

These are men who feel called to serve the Lord through service to their parishes and their communities. In a parochial setting, a deacon assists at the liturgical services, preaches the Gospel, brings the Eucharist to the sick and homebound, and works especially in the service areas of parish life.

Beginning on June 15, 2003 twenty-five men from the Pittsburgh, Parma, and Van Nuys eparchies of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America will begin the second Deacon Formation Program at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh. Twenty men completed the first program that began in 1999 and just recently was completed in May 2003.

The new class of deacon candidates will reside at the seminary for two-weeks over four summers in an intensive study and formation program. The students will then continue through the year with distance learning, reading and writing papers related to their studies. Mentors will be assigned to each candidate to assist with and monitor their progress.

“I am happy to welcome this new class,” said Father John G. Petro, “and challenge them to be as motivated and enthusiastic as our first group. When they finish four years from now, they will fill a great need in our Church.”

Father Thomas Hopko Addresses 3rd Annual Lecture Series

The Very Reverend Thomas Hopko, Dean Emeritus of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, NY, addressed the 3rd annual SS. Cyril and Methodius Lecture on Monday, May 5, 2003.

His topic was “Made Perfect Through Suffering (Heb 2:10)...On Christ’s Humiliation and Human Deification.”

Fr. Hopko spoke to an audience of over 200 men and women at the annual convocation that took place at St. Paul’s Seminary in Pittsburgh. Drawing on his vast experience as a teacher, Fr. Hopko was eloquent in offering an insightful, dynamic, challenging and passionate presentation. In the words of one participant “It was a mind-stretching evening” as Fr. Hopko probed deeply into the meaning of the humanity of Jesus.

The author of countless articles in books, journals, magazines, encyclopedias and newspapers, Fr. Hopko has served a distinguished career as pastor, teacher and administrator. He retired in 2002 but continues to work for St. Vladimir’s in recruitment and public relations activities.

Fr. John G. Petro, rector of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary, noted that one of the goals of this lecture series is to offer to the larger community an opportunity to come together in an academic and ecumenical setting. This year there were representatives from sixteen different eparchies, dioceses and jurisdictions.

Michael O’Loughlin Dreamed

Seminarian Michael O’Loughlin remembers a very unusual dream. In it he was the father of a “beautiful baby boy,” but the child was taken away from him by a mysterious woman. He awoke troubled and couldn’t forget the dream.

A few months later as he casually leafed through a missionary magazine at church, he was shocked to see the exact woman of his dream, living in extreme poverty and carrying the boy that was taken from him. He believed it to be a message from God about the priesthood.

“I get inspired very easily,” said Michael, “and I can apply all the things that I really love to the life of ministry. More than anything though, I feel a calling from God to be a priest, and I can’t put into words exactly why.”

Like any young man, however, making the decision to give his life in service to God wasn’t an easy one. “Some of my friends at home don’t understand my decision,” Michael said. “However, my parents have been very supportive, as were my college friends.”

Michael, a second year theology student at the seminary, grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He attended with his parents and four brothers and sisters (of whom he is the oldest), Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Albuquerque, the parish where Father Christopher Zuger serves as pastor. “Father Chris has been a wonderful example of dedication to his parish family,” says Michael.

Michael attended Franciscan University of Steubenville where he received a B.A. in philosophy. He made the decision to enter the seminary after an active life at Steubenville where he studied, dated, and played a lot of Ultimate Frisbee. A young man who loves music, he keeps a drum set in the seminary recreational area.

“I love the seminary,” Michael said. “I love the feeling that I’m preparing for something I really want to do. The faculty and staff are absolutely wonderful. They care so much about preparing us.”

Michael was greatly influenced by the Community of Friars of Renewal, a religious order he calls, “absolutely amazing,” and he almost joined them, but said he preferred the “solemnity of the Byzantine Church,” calling it “my type of praying.” He counts the story of the “Good Thief” among his favorites and admires St. Stephen for his “courage and loyalty to his friendship with Christ.”

Michael, who considers Homiletics his best class, was ordained a Reader on Sunday, May 11, in his home parish. After he is ordained to the priesthood, he hopes to return to the Southwest to involve himself in social ministry as well as parish work.

“I am interested in social justice,” he said. “A priest has the ability to counsel, to teach, to give so much. I feel blessed to have this calling.”

Fr. John G. Petro, the seminary rector commented: “Michael is a very refreshing young man, full of enthusiasm and zeal for ministry. The Church of Van Nuys will be blessed to have him as a future minister.”

Center of Learning

Many people walk the halls of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary. Seminarians are, of course, foremost among them. But many others occupy the classrooms, chapel, and even the sleeping quarters of the 53 year-old facility on Pittsburgh’s Observatory Hill.

To wit: The seminary welcomed many of the faithful in March and April, 2003 for Sunday Vespers during the Great Fast. Vespers began on Sunday March 9th and continued every Sunday until April 13th. Guest homilists included Fr. David Petras, Fr. Joseph Raptopsh, Fr. Dennis Bogda, Fr. Jack Custer, Fr. Simeon Sibenik, and Fr. James Spontak. In the six weeks, over 300 people attended the Vespers and “clothed themselves with the armor of light.”

Many more learners have attended the Metropolitan Cantor Institute, led by Seminary professor J. Michael Thompson, and taught by experts from the local area, as well as a six week Iconography course, sponsored by the Office of Religious Education during the Great Fast and the Deacon Formation Program that was cited in this publication.

The footsteps of over 50 high school and college students resounded on March 23rd as young people attended a day of reflection, “The Cross is I Crossed Out,” led by Fr. Tom West dock, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Uniontown, PA, and St. Mary’s Church in Morgantown, WV. The day consisted of a keynote speech, followed by breakout sessions. The day ended with Divine Liturgy and Senior Recognition.

Those who were “Absolute Beginners” to using the Bible in Catechetics attended a Catechist Formation Workshop led by Fr. Jack Custer at the seminary on Saturday, March 29th. Fr. Jack, dean and faculty member at the seminary, led guests in discussions entitled, “How the Bible Happened” and “A User’s Guide to the Bible.” Vespers concluded the day.

Praying, learning, discussing, singing – these have been and continue to be among the many activities of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary – which is truly developing into a Center of Learning.
Fr. Ed Cimbala
Artist and Priest

Indianapolis, or Managing Director of the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, or Managing Director of the ballet company Ballet El Paso, Texas.

Tough to imagine?

This is precisely the background of Father Edward G. Cimbala, D.Min., pastor of St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Hillsborough, New Jersey, Administrator of St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Dunellen, New Jersey, and member of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary Advisory Board.

With a theatre degree from Glassboro State College (now Rowan University) and a minor in marketing and communication, Father Ed spent several successful years in arts management and arts consulting before he decided that “something was missing and God was calling.”

At 29, Fr. Ed says, “I thought about my life. I had enjoyed what I was doing, the fun stuff, but I heard a clear message from God. That’s when I decided to enter the priestly life.”

Fr. Ed, originally from Trenton, New Jersey, was ordained by Bishop Michael J. Dudick on May 8, 1988 and celebrated his solemn Divine Liturgy in St. Mary’s in Trenton one week later. He served as pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Jessup, Pennsylvania before returning to Trenton for a time as pastor.

In addition to his parish duties, Fr. Ed also serves as Director of Vocations for the Eparchy of Passaic and Director of Deacon Formation. He still finds time to serve on the seminary’s Advisory Board, as well. And, when asked about these roles he is forthright.

“As vocation director,” Fr. Ed says, “I invite men to explore the priesthood as a calling. One of the things I learned at the seminary was to love and serve God’s people. Our seminary teaches men how to be good and loving priests. I encourage men of this mind to consider this vocation to ordained ministry.”

Asked about his service to the seminary, Fr. Ed replied, “Our people must realize that when they support the seminary they support the future of our Church. The seminary is an exciting place, developing into a Center for Eastern Christian Studies, a place where people can study and learn. We need ‘think tank’ kinds of places like our seminary.”
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