

Office of Communications

Orthodox Church in America Diocese of New York and New Jersey

RELEASE NUMBER 2011.3.1

In response to the “**Vision for Our Future**” announced by His Grace, Bishop +Michael, and the launching of the related **Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors** program, the parish of Saint John the Baptist in Rochester NY has committed its support of an initiative to provide financial support to a seminarian from our diocese.

According to the parish rector, Father Ken James Stavrevsky, the idea originated in light of the parish’s tradition of offering some form of outreach each year through which financial assistance is offered as a stewardship extending beyond the needs of the local parish community. “In the past,” he said, “we have sponsored several missionaries in Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, and Cameroon through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center; and we recently provided a flock of 5 sheep to a family in Africa through World Vision.” In planning for the 2011 budget, the question of how the parish would respond to its historic desire to reach out in love by offering financial assistance was raised. The answer seemed at hand as Bishop +Michael was formulating a diocesan vision that identified three vital areas in need of support: 1) Support for mission parishes, 2) Support for existing (struggling) parishes, and 3) Support for seminarians.



Gus Platas was the Parish Council Warden when the decision was made to bring a proposal to the annual parish meeting on 19 September to offer a \$6,000 (\$500 per month for 12 months) seminarian scholarship during 2011. “When Father Ken suggested to our Parish Council that we adopt a family in the seminarian program,” he said, “I was fully supportive. I knew our parishioners would be, too!” Indeed, the parish was responsive and supportive, approving the motion by an enthusiastic and unanimous vote. “We hoped to develop a relationship with our ‘adopted’ seminarian and his family,” said Father Stavrevsky. “We want to keep them in our thoughts and prayerfully remember them by name in our services ... it’s about more than just writing a check.”

The recipient of the seminarian scholarship is the Markewich family: Matthew, Rebekah, Katherine (six months of age) and a child-in-the-womb expected this summer. A second year student at Saint Tikhon’s Seminary, Matthew Markewich came to the Orthodox faith through the ministry of Father Peter Olsen and Saint Basil’s Church in Watervliet NY. Born and raised in Nyack NY, he was raised with exposure to both Lutheran and Jewish traditions. While studying history at the State University of New York at Albany, he began a journey to Orthodoxy.

“I began going to an evangelical youth group. After a few years, I had an experience where I came to understand that God was real, and I became very active as a Christian. This was in 2002. After about two years, I asked myself, ‘Why do I believe my tradition of Christianity is true when it is at most only 500 years old?’ I began researching Orthodoxy and Catholicism and came to believe the Orthodox Church is the original, and true Church. While in college, I was Chrismated at Saint Basil's Orthodox Church in Watervliet on December 10, 2006 by Father Peter Olsen.”

Rebekah Markewich was a graduate student of history at SUNY Albany when she met Matthew. Her own personal journey to Orthodoxy was about to begin.

“I grew up on a sheep farm in Sprakers NY. I was raised Pentecostal and both my parents and grandparents were and are pastors. About three years ago I began looking for the Early Church after, ironically, reading a Pentecostal book. The following month I took a graduate class on the Early Church and also met Matthew ... the first Orthodox person I ever discussed theology with. It is funny to look back on, because we used to sit in the campus food court discussing theology. I thought Orthodoxy was interesting, but it was still very foreign to me at the time. I wasn't even close to converting. I actually wanted Matt to become Pentecostal! However, as I learned more I began to realize that the Early Church still did exist and it was Orthodox. About the time that I came to this conclusion, Matthew and I started dating. I was also Chrismated at Saint Basil's Church in Watervliet. We were married about a year later. Matt started seminary a month after our wedding. It has been a challenging, yet rewarding time in which God has been teaching us how to trust that He will always be there for us.”



The parish welcomed the Markewich family to Rochester NY on 15-16 January. The visit included a reception social following Great Vespers on Saturday evening and the annual parish Ethiopian/Eritrean Dinner on Sunday following the Divine Liturgy. “We are all so very blessed,” said Gus Platas, “and I knew that our parishioners would be glad to share our blessings by helping to support a seminarian family. After meeting Matthew, Rebekah, and little Katherine Markewich last week, I am so glad we are able to assist them as they pursue their spiritual calling.” Marilyn Holthe, a recently received Catechumen, was thrilled by the visit. “It's always a warm feeling to be able to help people, but to have an ongoing connection with a young, Orthodox family and to be able to hear about their personal experiences while attending Saint Tikhon's Seminary is enriching and encouraging.” She continued, “to see them in person, to touch them, to give them our gifts, opens my heart to this real family who wants to dedicate their lives to spreading the Word. It adds more substance to giving by exchanging a moment of love that remains with you for the length of the relationship, which I hope is

