

## Archpriest John Matusiak

Archpriest John Matusiak, 69, Director of Communications for the Orthodox Church in America, and Pastor Emeritus of Saint Joseph Church, Wheaton, IL, fell asleep in the Lord on the evening of Thursday, August 15, 2019, the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, after a short battle with cancer.

Throughout his life, Father John worked in a variety of capacities at the international, national, diocesan, and local levels of the Orthodox Church in America. His life's work ranged from singer, cantor, and composer to author, editor, speaker, and from artist and iconographer to teacher, tour leader, and missionary.

In these diverse activities, Father John preserved a balance between faithfully adhering to the teachings of the historic church and identifying ways to make the gospel alive and compelling to those living in our modern world.

Born on January 6, 1950, in Erie, PA, Father John was raised in the Orthodox Faith at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, being active in the life of the church from his youth as an altar server and singing in the choir.

After studying fine arts at the Cleveland School of Design, Father John's love of Christ and His holy church led him to enroll at St. Tikhon's Seminary, South Canaan, PA in 1969. He later transferred to [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#), Yonkers, NY where he enrolled in their pre-theological program and graduated from Iona College, New Rochelle, with a Bachelor Degree in Communications, and from Saint Vladimir's with a Master of Divinity. During his seminary days Father John conducted choir at the seminary chapel and at Holy Trinity, Yonkers, as well as being a member and director of the seminary Octet.

Over the last 50 years, Father John has worked tirelessly in a variety of ways to bring people closer to Christ, and to expand the mission of the Orthodox Church in America.

Among the many highlights of his labors, Father John worked for decades with the [Department of Christian Education](#) (DCE), beginning in 1969 with a simple request to create a coloring book for youth, which led to larger projects, developing education materials, content, curricula, organizing and leading youth retreats, and presenting teacher training workshops in parishes coast to coast.

It was his talent and approach with educators and his interest in youth work that led to Father John's appointment as head of the "OCA Youth Desk" in 1972. Immersing himself in that opportunity, Father John organized events and the means for hundreds of Orthodox youth and young adults to come together, learn about Christ, and be encouraged to talk about what it meant to be an Orthodox Christian in today's world.

Father John's labors for the church frequently extended beyond the boundaries of the Orthodox Church in America. He worked with John Boojamra, head of the [Orthodox Christian Education Commission](#) (OCEC), to develop educational resources, training materials, and youth retreats across North America regardless of jurisdiction or nationality.

Working with James Couchell (later, His Grace, Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos) at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Father John contributed to the establishment of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), a pan-Orthodox ministry program for college students. The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese invited Father John to organize training workshops and a teacher training seminars held during their national conventions.

Father John's work with youth and young adults also reached around the world through SYNDESMOS – the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth – where, as a Vice President, he worked with youth directors, clergy, and other future leaders of world Orthodoxy to organize pan-Orthodox retreats, pilgrimages, and workshops on an international level.

In the late 1970's Father John began organizing international pilgrimages for adults and young people alike to discover Orthodoxy in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and other parts of Eastern Europe. These trips were soon followed by visits from young people from Eastern Europe to explore the riches of Orthodoxy in America. Father John's travels to Russia during the Soviet period introduced him to hierarchs and clergy of the Church in Russia, most notably Patriarchs Pimen and Alexy II, and Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk.

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Through those contacts, and after the fall of communism, the Church of Russia asked Father John to develop youth ministry programs for the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1991 Father John participated in the inaugural conference of the newly formed All Church Youth Movement of the Church of Russia.

As [OCA youth](#) director, Father John was responsible for providing content and resources for use at the parish level. This led to other opportunities for Father John to write, collaborate, and design, and he later served as editor and author for publications including “The Orthodox Teacher,” (OCA-DRE) “The Youth Resource Handbook,” and “On the Upbeat,” (OCEC), “The Vigil” (OCA-Diocese of the Midwest), and “The Orthodox Church” (OCA), while providing additional content for many other church publications both in North America and Europe.

Father John worked with the OCA’s national and diocesan departments of Christian Education, organizing teacher training sessions, and creating resources for use in local parishes. Father John also taught a number of courses at [St. Tikhon’s Seminary](#), including Dogmatics, working with the seminarians to have a deeper understanding of their own faith and how to articulate that in a pluralistic society.

In 1976, the Orthodox Church in America published a 200+ page compendium celebrating the history of Orthodoxy in North America. As managing editor, Father John provided much of the creative design and content including thoughtful reflections on the early saints of our lands – Herman and Innocent – and those who at the time were not yet formally recognized as saints of the church – Tikhon, Alexis, Juvenaly, and Sebastian – along with inspiring glimpses into the rich mosaic of communities found in our then very young Orthodox Church in America.

Upon arriving in Chicago in 1983, Father John was appointed the Director of Communication for the Diocese of the Midwest, handling the design and production of “The Vigil,” the diocesan newspaper. He worked with diocesan hierarchs, local clergy, and faithful to celebrate the vibrant life of communities across 11 states.

Father John served as Managing Editor of [“The Orthodox Church”](#) (TOC) newspaper for the last twenty-eight years, coordinating with Protoperbyter

Leonid Kishkovsky, Editor of the TOC, in the creation of thousands of articles about life in the Orthodox Church in America, highlighting the labors and efforts of His Beatitude, our hierarchs, clergy, faithful, and youth, providing a look at what Orthodoxy in America is today. With the advent of new technology and opportunities, Father John led the transition from black and white to color printing, and then from newspaper to magazine format, and ultimately to an all-digital format, always in an effort to reach faithful as effectively as possible.

Since 1998, Father John served as the OCA’s Director of Communications, engaging local and national media on current events and teachings of the church, and writing hundreds of news releases. Working with OCA and diocesan chancellors, Father John perfected the art of drafting church media resources to effectively promote the Orthodox Church in America and its mission to be the Church in North America.

With the advent of the internet in the 1990s, Father John was instrumental in the development of a web presence for the Orthodox Church in America. His years of experience and strategic approach to storytelling guided efforts to organize content in a user-friendly manner. As oca.org evolved and became more complex with technological advances, the most popular resource on the site remained the most basic, the [popular Q&A service](#) available via [info@oca.org](mailto:info@oca.org). Over the years, from the “west wing of the chancery” in Chicago, Father John personally responded to nearly 100,000 questions about Orthodox Christianity submitted by Orthodox and seekers alike from around the world.

Father John’s creative talents were most widely recognized in his iconography and [line drawings](#). Beginning in 1969, when Archpriest John Kivko, department chair of the Department of Religious Education (DRE), asked him to create a coloring book for youth, that led to Father John providing drawings for the original [“Rainbow Series”](#) by Protoperbyter Thomas Hopko.

By the 1980s, Father John had created hundreds of drawings which were assembled into a camera-ready book published by Light & Life Publishing which is still in use, ***Con’t Pg 11***

and even now found in digital format. Father John's iconography frequently appears within OCA publications and online, and especially in areas near his parish assignments. From icons for personal veneration to frescoes adorning the dome, iconostasis, and walls of local churches, Father John frequently shared his knowledge and love of the liturgical arts by lecturing at museums, universities, and teaching icon painting to parishioners.

He also taught a simplified iconography course to youth, encouraging them to express their love for Christ through art. Working with church school and vacation bible school leaders, Father John would create custom projects in a variety of mediums (mosaics, wood burning, and stencils) for kids to make themselves and then bring to church for blessing and use during processions. His ideas often inspired those same young people as adults to come up with their own creative projects in church. Father John's extensive skill in Liturgical Music found its way into his pastoral ministry when the mission communities he established needed more practical arrangements and settings than those found in older communities. Following in the footsteps of Archpriest Sergei Glagolev, Father John would create service books where none were available, setting melodies or writing new harmonies for his parish's small choral ensembles and congregational use.

The departmental and administrative church work which was a life-long focus of Father John was always second to his love and dedication for pastoral ministry. His pastoral ministry had begun long before being ordained to the diaconate in November 1974, by Bishop Dmitri (Royster) of Hartford, and to the holy priesthood in January 1975, by Bishop Theodosius (Lazor) of Pittsburgh, but truly flourished in his parish assignments.

After graduating in 1975 from St. Vladimir's Seminary, the first parish assignment for Father John and his wife, Barbara (nee Zelina) was at St. Herman of Alaska Church, Shillington, PA. Their care and ministry to the faithful deeply impacted the young community. In 1977, Father John and his family moved to Saint Mary's Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN where he connected with parishioners of all generations, ministering to them while also supporting the work of the church at the

national level.

Life in the Minneapolis cathedral was active with different age groups and over 200 youth, and Father John thrived in the community, identifying ways for parishioners to come together in fellowship while remaining focused on worship at the heart of their lives as Orthodox Christians. From Sunday night young adult hang-outs in his basement to youth mission trips into northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, bringing the revered Tikhvin icon of the Mother of God from Chicago, Father John engaged young people where they were at in life, encouraging them to stay strong in their Orthodox Faith.

In 1983, Father John was appointed as Director of Church Growth for Orthodox Church in America and spent the next three years developing resources and traveling throughout North America leading workshops and training seminars for parishes. In 1984 Father John and his family moved to Chicago and while continuing his work for the OCA, establishing St. Luke Church, Palos Hills, IL serving the community for 5 years. While also teaching at Joliet Catholic High School, Joliet, IL, Father John dedicated his life during those years to building up the new community which was expanding the reach of Orthodoxy into Chicago's suburbs.

In 1989 Father John was called to establish yet another mission parish in the western suburbs of Chicago which became St. Joseph Church, Wheaton, IL. He continued his work with the national and diocesan church administrations while also applying the many past experiences to the young community. The approach differed slightly from previous communities because the parishioners were slightly different, but the goal was always the same, bring the Light of Christ to those in his care.

The community of St. Joseph's, made up of second, third, and fourth generation Americans, experienced a wave of immigration after the fall of communism, introducing new pastoral considerations not expected in a suburban parish community. Yet Father John guided the faithful through the challenge by providing resources to help the Orthodox faithful who arrived in America with little more than what they were wearing. The community was living the gospel out in their service to others. The divine liturgy was celebrated on Saturday mornings in non-English languages, followed by English language classes *Con't Pg 12*

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taught by parishioners, and meetings to help the new members to develop the language and skill sets to find jobs in the area.

As pastor, Father John also guided the community through the process of building a church, using Alaskan churches as the architectural model, reflective of American Orthodoxy and the parish community's own vision of being the local church in Wheaton. Between other projects, Father John painted the first two rows of icons on the iconostasis, and prepared the music books for parishioners to use during divine services.

Through all of these experiences, Father John dedicated his life to bringing people closer to God by building up the Orthodox Church in North America.

He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Barbara. His son, the Archdeacon Joseph and Nina, his daughter, Juliana and Michael, and 5 grandchildren (Alexander, Noah, Daniel, Silas and Zofia.)

In lieu of flowers, a monetary gift to Matushka Barbara Matusiak would be appreciated. Gifts can be sent to 570 Crescent Blvd #506, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-8307.

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## **Fr. Lawrence Con't**

Many miles separated us from both Fr. Steven and Fr. John, so that I never got to know them as well as others did. But that hardly mattered: one knows a lion when one sees one.

One feels the loss keenly, which in a way is rather odd. Their deaths were hardly unexpected, since they both came after extended battles with cancer. Yet their passings still strike us with all the force of an unexpected blow, and feel not so much like the loss of a friend as the loss of a limb. We feel personally diminished, robbed, impoverished. I suspect that we experience such deaths as if they were unexpected because death is so unnatural: they, like everyone else, were never meant to die. They, like everyone else, were created to live with God forever. And now that Christ has risen from the dead, and has trampled down death by death, they will.

## **CHURCH SIGN**

*Under the same Management for 2000 years!*

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One is tempted to say in the style of funeral eulogies that we will never see the like of such lions again. But it would be rash to say that, since their leonine grandeur was not the inevitable result of their DNA or their upbringing, but was ultimately the gift of God. It is God who makes lions and saints, and if He did it with Fr. Steven and Fr. John, He can do it again with others as He pleases. The Holy Spirit did not die with them, and He can inspire others as He inspired them. What we can say is that no one will ever again be quite like them. They were unique gifts, and that is why we will miss them.

Where does their passing leave us, and what do we do now? I suggest three things: gratitude, anticipation, and inspiration.

As we think over their lives, we should give thanks to God that He gave us such gifts as Fr. Steven and Fr. John. In this case gratitude to the Giver involves also gratitude to the gifts themselves. We express our gratitude to these lions for all they have done for us by mingling our tears with supplication, and commending them before the throne of God. Let us pray for them and their families, confident that they are also praying for us in the Kingdom,

Secondly, we live in anticipation. It was C.S. Lewis who said, "Christians never say good-bye"; they only say, "*Au revoir*", be seeing you. Death cannot separate us from Christ, and so it cannot finally separate us from one another. Soon enough we will see them again, and that will be a merry meeting.

Finally, we may draw inspiration from their lives. These lions walk among us no longer; they now walk and shake their manes in the high halls of heaven. But we will never forget them. And remembering them we can be inspired to a little leonine greatness ourselves. The world still needs such greatness. Taught by these good men, let us do our best to roar.

## Apostle Titus of the Seventy and Bishop of Crete

Commemorated on [August 25](#)

Saint Titus, Apostle of the Seventy was a native of the island of Crete, the son of an illustrious pagan. In his youth he studied Hellenistic philosophy and the ancient poets. Preoccupied by the sciences, Titus led a virtuous life, not devoting himself to the vices and passions characteristic of the majority of pagans. He preserved his virginity, as the Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer (December 20) testifies of him.

For such a manner of life the Lord did not leave him without His help. At age twenty Saint Titus heard a voice in a dream, suggesting that he abandon Hellenistic wisdom, which could not provide salvation for his soul, but rather to seek that which would save him. After this dream, Saint Titus waited yet another year, since it was not actually a command, but it did guide him to familiarize himself with the teachings of the prophets of God. The first that he happened to read was the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Having opened it to the 47th Chapter, he was struck by the words, speaking as it were about his own spiritual condition.

When news reached Crete about the appearance of a Great Prophet in Palestine, and about the great miracles He worked, the governor of the island of Crete (an uncle of Titus) sent him there. This Prophet was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, incarnate of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Who came into the world for the redemption of the race of mankind from the oppression of ancestral sin.

At Jerusalem, Saint Titus saw the Lord. He heard His preaching and believed in Him. He witnessed the suffering and death of the Savior on the Cross, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension to Heaven. On the day of Pentecost the future apostle heard how the Twelve Apostles, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, spoke in various languages, among which was the Cretan language (Acts 2: 11).

Saint Titus accepted Baptism from the Apostle Paul and became his closest disciple. He accompanied Saint Paul on his missionary journeys, fulfilling the tasks entrusted to him.

He was involved in establishing new churches, and was with Paul in Jerusalem.

Saint Titus was numbered among the Seventy Apostles and was made Bishop of Crete by the Apostle Paul. Around the year 65, not long before his second imprisonment, the Apostle Paul sent a pastoral epistle to his son in the Faith (Tit. 1: 4). When the Apostle Paul was taken like a criminal to Rome to stand trial before Caesar, Saint Titus left his flock in Crete for a time and went to Rome to be of service to his spiritual Father. After Saint Paul's death by martyrdom, Titus returned to Gortyna, the chief city of Crete.

Saint Titus peacefully guided his flock and toiled at enlightening the pagans with the light of faith in Christ. He was granted the gift of wonder-working by the Lord. During one of the pagan feasts in honor of the goddess Diana, Titus preached to a crowd of pagans.

When he saw that they would not listen to him, he prayed to the Lord, so that the Lord Himself would show to the mistaken people the falseness of idols. By the prayer of Saint Titus, the idol of Diana fell down and shattered before the eyes of all. Another time Saint Titus prayed that the Lord would not permit the completion of a temple of Zeus, and it collapsed.

By such miracles Saint Titus brought many to faith in Christ. After bringing the light of faith to the surrounding regions, Saint Titus died peacefully at the age of 97. At the time of his death, his face shone like the sun.

### FUNNY HUMOR

Saw this on a church sign driving to Chicago the other day:

**WHO EVER STOLE OUR AC UNITS KEEP ONE IT IS HOT WHERE YOU ARE GOING!**

Someone sent this to me from TX:

**With all this rain we need an Ark! Fear not!**

(Wait for it)

We **NOAH** guy!

## Talking to Your Children about Death

I remember when death came into our family for the first time. I was about 12 years old when my mother's first cousin passed away. I was not prepared to deal with how my relatives dealt with death in Greek culture. When we went to the home of my mother's first cousin, his wife and a few other women were sitting on a couch. After my mom entered, all of the sudden this ongoing wailing and crying started among several of the women with my mom joining in. This wasn't just shedding a tear; it was ongoing, out loud crying with words being recited in Greek that I could barely understand. This continued with each new person who entered the house. Meanwhile, the men in the home remained stoic and unexpressive. It continued into the funeral service at the Greek Orthodox Church.

All of this freaked me out. What I do remember about this is that after his death (the first cousin), my mom was not the same health wise. Contrast this with my experience of the death of a good neighbor of Presbyterian background when we lived in Detroit. When I went to the funeral home, everyone was talking like it was a party and there were no tears. My neighbor's casket was unnoticeable until I saw it at the far end of room. His wife was by the casket talking to people, but there was no line of greeting, no crying, not even any somber sadness.

Over time, as I reflected upon these two contrasting experiences of death, I came to see that there were problems with both of them. Before continuing, I want to quote these verses from St. John of Damascus, which are sung at an Orthodox funeral service:

*"What earthly sweetness remains unmixed with grief? What glory stands immutable on earth? All things are but feeble shadows, all things are most deluding dreams: yet one moment only, and Death shall supplant them all. But in the light of Your countenance, O Christ, and in the sweetness of Your beauty, give rest unto him whom You have chosen: forasmuch as You love mankind."*

What I love about this hymn of St. John is it communicates a bitter sweetness in death. In our funeral services we allow for grieving to occur, yet we do not grieve without hope. Our funeral service teaches about the reality of death and why death came into the world. But it also offers the solution to death in prayers and hymns related to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

*O God of spirits and of all flesh, You trampled upon death and abolished the power of the devil, giving life to*

*Your world. Give rest to the soul of Your departed servant in a place of light, in a place of green pasture, in a place of refreshment, from where pain, sorrow, and sighing have fled away.*

At the funeral service, clergy and servers vest in white, the color of Resurrection, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the week, the first day of the new creation. So the death of an Orthodox Christian should never be an occasion for morose, hopeless grieving, nor one where the reality of death is denied and no tears are expressed. Having said that, next week, I will speak as to how families can prepare their children to deal with death when it does happen.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you,  
The unworthy +Paul

### 1 Corinthians 4:9-16 (Epistle)

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the scouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

### SOME MORE HUMOR

*The fact the song said's there is a highway to Hell and only a Stairway to Heaven says a lot about anticipated traffic numbers*