

October 22, 2017

My Dear Fathers, Parishioners, and Friends,

I greet you all in the name of our loving and merciful Lord Jesus Christ!

In the absence of reliable information, rumors grow and abound. Thus it seems to me that it is high time that I dispel the spread of rumors by telling the full story, at least as I see it, of the transition presently taking place at St George Antiochian Orthodox Parish of Portland.

For many years now I have suffered from a debilitating neurological condition known as “cervical dystonia” or “spasmodic torticollis.” I will not bore you with the details (you can Google it if you want to know more) but it is extremely painful and sometimes limits my ability to serve the parish as well as I would wish. The severity of my symptoms has waxed and waned over a two-decade span, but in recent years I have become aware that my good periods are becoming shorter and my bad ones longer. Observing this progression, a few years ago I alerted His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph, that at some time in the future my health might become compromised enough that I would no longer be able to serve a parish community of the size and vitality of St George. He accepted my report and together we waited to see what the future would hold.

This past July, Sayidna Joseph decided that the time had come to offer me assistance with my pastoral responsibilities at St George. At the Archdiocese Convention in Miami he shared with me the fact that he would soon be sending an Arabic-speaking priest, Fr George Saada, to assist me with my labors. He asked me to consult with my parish council officers and report back to him with a plan on how we would provide for Fr George. I came home and immediately consulted with the parish council chairman and treasurer. In reviewing the parish finances it was clear to all of us that there was no way that our community could support two full-time priests. Thus I asked Sayidna for his blessing to seek employment outside the parish so that the parish's finances could be devoted to the support of Fr George and his family. Sayidna Joseph graciously assented, granting his blessing for me to seek an alternative source of income to support my family.

After carefully considering all my available career options, I decided that the best course of action would be for me to pursue a master's degree in counseling. This training will allow me to support my family in the future while continuing to serve the Church as a counselor priest. For many years I have wished to pursue further studies in marriage and family therapy, so this seemed like an ideal time to move forward in this direction. Thus I began to make preparations. Kh Krista and I put our house up for sale so that we could reduce our living expenses and began to look for a house in a less costly market near to Portland. We found a house in Salem, Oregon that is close to the school where I wish to study and which would suit our family's needs for the future. With God's help, our moving plans are advancing.

On October 6, Fr George Saada arrived for a visit to Portland in order that we could meet him and he could get to know us. I could not be more pleased with the result. From the moment that I met him, Fr George seemed to me like a long-lost brother. He is a priest with great experience and skill and a man of deep faith. He has true humility, love, and devotion to the Church. I cannot imagine that there is a priest anywhere to whom I would more readily turn over the pastoral care of my beloved parish. Fr George has suffered and labored for the Orthodox Faith in the afflicted land of Syria beyond what most of us can imagine. His story is for him to tell, but I assure you that he is more than abundantly equipped to love and to serve our parish and that he has a heart of pure gold. As I have loved the Parish of St George, I am confident that he will love its people just as much, if not more. Our parish is in very good hands.

Fr George has now returned to his wife and children in Ohio, from whom he has been separated for many months as he has been serving the Church in various temporary assignments. They are now preparing to make the move to Portland together. They will arrive, God willing, at the start of November, at which time Fr George will take up his responsibilities as the full-time priest of St George while I transition to my new role as a volunteer priest preparing to become a full-time student for a few years. At Sayidna Joseph's direction I will continue, for the time being, to occupy the role of pastor (senior priest) at St George with the final responsibility for pastoral and administrative matters, but Fr George will serve the day-to-day pastoral needs of the parish and will be the sole salaried clergyman of St George. I trust that the parishioners of St George and the clergy and faithful of our entire region will support him with their love and prayers. You will find him to be a true spiritual father of boundless devotion.

It has been my very great joy to serve for twenty years as the full-time pastor of St George. I have treasured every minute and I thank God for every service and for every pastoral interaction with which I have been graced. It is with sadness for my loss that I lay aside my daily pastoral responsibilities, but also with great hope for the future and with joyful expectation of what God will accomplish in our midst under Fr George's devoted care. Please be assured that I and my family embark upon this new chapter in our lives with joyful anticipation and with confidence that we will be supported always by your love and your prayers. Thank you all for making the past twenty years a season of unparalleled joy and blessing under God's gracious providence.

Glory to God for all things!

With love in Christ,  
+Fr Alban