



HOLY TRANSFIGURATION

Orthodox Mission

Our mission ✕ Our faith ✕ Our people



Maruroopa Palli (Transfiguration Chapel)
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*Shubaho Labo, Lab'ro, Vale Ruho Kadeesho. Men'
Olam. Vade Mel'olam, Olmeen. Amin.*

*In name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Now and ever and forever. Amen.*



CHURCH PICNIC, 2006

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My name is Teresa Peneguy Paprock, and I am the wife of Rev. Fr. John-Brian Paprock of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in Madison, Wisconsin. With deep respect and in humility, I would like to tell you about our Mission, and why I believe it fulfills a unique need here.

Since the Madison Mission became part of the Mission Society of St. Gregorios of India in 2001 – through the compassion of Mar Makarios Thirumeni (of blessed memory) – we have been honored to serve worshippers from an amazing variety of backgrounds.

From Madison, the closest Oriental Orthodox churches are in Milwaukee, Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul (between two and five hours away). And many Oriental Orthodox did not feel comfortable at the Greek or Antiochian Orthodox churches here.

Before the Mission, Oriental Orthodox here made long trips out of town to worship; attended Catholic or Protestant churches; or stopped attending church altogether. Because of the Mission, many traditionally Oriental Orthodox have been making their way back to the Church – and bringing their children with them, several of which have been baptized at our Mission.

Madison tends to be a transient community, with many people moving in and out of the area. Therefore, many different people have worshipped with us through the years. They have been from Kerala, from Egypt, from Ethiopia, from Eritrea, from Armenia, from Turkey, from Poland, from Ukraine, and from the United States.

Because John-Brian Achen is American, and the services are in English, the Mission has become a “neutral”

place to worship. For example, families from Ethiopia and Eritrea feel comfortable worshipping together at the Mission together – even though their countries have been in conflict for many years. The Mission has also attracted Americans who have embraced the truths they discovered in Oriental Orthodoxy, several have converted to our faith. Several American adults have been baptized in our Mission.

In addition to serving the Mission, John-Brian Achen is a chaplain at UW Hospital and Clinics and at the local Hospice Center. He has provided spiritual care to thousands of patients and families over the years. Only a few of these have been Oriental Orthodox, but their families were very grateful to have sacraments available from an Orthodox priest. Members of some of these families have become our most regular attendees.

As a board-certified pastoral counselor, Achen has many years' experience in helping those facing many challenges of American society – such as alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, and family problems. With God's help, our Mission has seen several people undergo true healing in these areas. Achen has also earned a certificate in non-profit administration from Marquette University.

Achen was ordained to the Orthodox Priesthood in 1987 (in a former American Mission of the Holy Synod of ROCOR), but took a voluntary leave for personal reasons. Reinstated to the Priesthood in 1998, Achen found himself profoundly drawn to the vision of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios (of blessed memory).

Specifically, Achen admired Mar Gregorios' deep commitment to cooperation between the world's religions (as President of the World Council of Churches, and deliverer of the Inaugural Address for the Parliament of the World's Religions). Achen also was attracted His Grace's tireless work to promote world peace, and love for all people without regard to economic status, color or creed.

It was in the spirit of these values – tolerance, love, and peace – that, after much prayer and contemplation, we chose to approach the Mar Gregorios' beloved church – the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. And we wish to share His Grace's cherished values through Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in Madison, Wisconsin.

We would be greatly honored if you would read, on the following pages ...

✠ *The words of a few of the people who attend our church and who have been directly impacted by our Mission.*

✠ *A small sampling of communications we've received from people throughout the world. Some have Achen's writings online at www.maruroopa.blogspot.com or www.frjohbrian.blogspot.com. Some have read his book, "Living in the Eighth Day." Some have listened to his sermons via podcast. Some have met Achen during times of crisis at the hospital or hospice.*

✠ *One of many newspaper articles that have been written about our Mission, introducing Madison-area readers to Oriental Orthodoxy.*

Thank you for your time. With the deepest gratitude, and in His name,

– *Teresa Kochamma*
May 2008



JOHN-BRIAN ACHEN & TERESA KOCHAMMA
25TH ANNUAL ST. GREGORIOS FAMILY
& YOUTH CONFERENCE
PHILADELPHIA, 2005

What some of the people of our mission say...



Banchiyigezu Wolde – ETHIOPIA

I come to Holy Transfiguration Mission to worship my Lord and my Savior Jesus Christ. This is the only church that is similar to my native country church. I am from Ethiopia and I was born and raised in the capital city, Addis Ababa.

I came to the UW in 1970 with my husband when he went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for his Ph.D. in Agricultural Sciences.

I am very happy that I found Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church and attend the service every Sunday and it means a lot for me.

Cheryan Jacob and his wife, Merin – KERALA

Although we don't frequently attend the services at the Mission, it has been a great blessing to have this mission in Madison. We are extremely grateful to Achen for being available at the shortest of notices, providing solace and prayers and guidance to our small family and home in Madison, making us feel very much at home even though we are oceans away from our parent missions and homelands.

When we moved into our new house, because of our cultural and religious upbringing, we felt very uncomfortable and incomplete moving into the house without having the house blessed in a traditional Orthodox Syrian manner as we are used to. It was Achen's housewarming prayers and blessings that transformed our humble abode from a piece of construction to an actual complete Christian home, bringing great happiness and peace to both me and my spouse.

The Mission in Madison does much good work for the Orthodox Syrian Christians here and in the surrounding areas. Our heartfelt prayers and best wishes are with Achen, Kochamma, and the Mission always.



Haben Laine – ETHIOPIA and his mother, Weine Tesfamichael – ERITREA

My name is Haben Laine. I have been a churchgoer for the last couple of years with my mother Weine.

We have been very lucky and fortunate to be members of Holy Transfiguration. The priest and his wife have done a wonderful job in providing an excellent service to its church members and the community.

It has also been an honor for me to serve God and my soul under the supervision of the priest.

NOTE: Haben is studying architecture in college, and serves the Mission as an acolyte.

Geoffrey Gyrisco Ph.D. – UNITED STATES

As a former member of the Episcopalian (Anglican) Church, I had found Northwestern European Christianity to be inadequate and incomplete, both spiritually and in daily living.

I had studied South Asian spiritual traditions (yoga and Buddhism) but I decided that I wanted the real thing – Orthodox Christianity. For me, Orthodoxy provides me with a strong spiritual perspective, and it is



effective in my daily living.

Oriental Orthodoxy – preserved in Kerala, Armenia, Ethiopia and Eritrea – is the spiritual jewel of unadulterated, early Christianity. This jewel deserves to be shared with others who are searching for it.

With our Thirumeni's blessing, we recently celebrated Easter on the "old calendar" in deference to our Ethiopian and Eritrean members. A high point in John-Brian Achen's sermon was when he said, "In this moment, are whole and complete, despite what we feel we lack in income, health, and relationships." Achen emphasized that Christ *is* risen (present tense). In that moment, I got a glimpse of what our Holy Qurbana is about. It was not about an event in a distant time and a far-off land, but is close and immediate – as our Church teaches us.

Recently, our Mission moved from wealthy community in Madison to a low-income part of town. That move has yielded spiritual fruit. To our surprise – as we began our Easter Feast at 3 a.m. – several of our neighbors, curious because they had overheard our Qurbana, came to investigate. We welcomed them to join our feast.

Several of these Americans were clearly seeking spiritual direction in their lives, and asked many questions about our church and faith. One visitor, Todd, had not eaten a meal in two days, and was very poorly dressed. He was so humbled and grateful that we had warmly shared our table with him, he insisted on helping clean up after the meal – and attended our Qurbana the following Sunday.

As in Matthew 22:10, and also as in the Easter Sermon of John Chrysostom (... "For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first" ...), I believe our Mission nourishes our community's spiritual hunger.

NOTE: Geoffrey is a respected historian, and serves the Mission as a deacon.

Muluken Tilahun and his wife, Mulusew Yayehyirad; extended family; daughter, Mesi; twin sons, Mikias and Marcus – ETHIOPIA, and son, Michael – UNITED STATES

There are many reasons why we attend at this church. First of all, we are Orthodox Christians and we want to go to church whenever we can, so we can be close to God. Being part of this church makes that possible, because of the service, the flexibility, and the people who are kind to give free service. There aren't many churches in Madison that are like this one, and we are very thankful for that.

We learn new and interesting things every week. We feel like family the way we are treated. The priest is very talented and respectful of other cultures. We hope this Mission will go on and we will do whatever it takes to keep it going.

NOTE: The above was written by Mesi, an honor student at a Madison-area high school, on behalf of her entire extended family – including her grandmothers, parents, and siblings, who all attend services at the Mission regularly. Her brothers Mikias and Marcus, in middle school, serve the Mission as acolytes.

Mesi's mom, Mulusew Yayehyirad (Mulu), is a registered nurse in the ICU at St. Mary's Hospital in Madison. She has founded Clinic at a Time, a non-profit charitable organization to raise funds to improve health care in the Gojjam region of Ethiopia, where she grew up. John-Brian Achen and Teresa Kochamma serve on her organization's board of directors. Information is available at www.clinicatatime.org.

Mulu says, "I think my (Orthodox) faith helped me to become a better person and to do good for people. It also helped and still is helping me to hold on to the things that I believe in and to have a positive attitude about all the things I do and whatever is going on in my life."





AFTER A HOUSE BLESSING, LEENA CHACKO BOILS MILK TO OVERFLOWING, IN AN INDIAN TRADITION SYMBOLIZING FORTUNE AND ABUNDANCE IN A NEW HOME.

Chacko Daniel and his wife, Leena Chacko – KERALA

As a Malankara Orthodox Christian family from Kerala, one of the key desires we have is for us to be able to take part in a Malankara Orthodox Qurbana every Sunday.

When we were at Madison, the mission church fulfilled that desire.

Although the service was in English, we attended Qurbana at the Madison mission church regularly, and only occasionally drove to Chicago to attend the Malayalam service.

In our opinion, the service at the mission was very fulfilling and blessed for us.

The nearest church from Madison (with services in Malayalam) was a 3-hour drive away in Chicago.

So the Madison mission filled and continues to fill the need to have a Malankara Orthodox Church in Wisconsin.

John Hernon – UNITED STATES

My upbringing was not overly religious ... I've struggled with many things in this life trying to understand myself, the nature of this world, why we are here, and what is the truth.

Achen's services and sermons have instilled in me a renewed Love of God and further belief in the Holy Spirit; he is truly a light of Christ in this world.

My experience (baptism as an adult in our Mission) was extremely wonderful! I have touched God in a way I never knew existed. Whether one is baptized at birth or, like myself, at a later date, I don't think that matters much to God. All he asks (in my view) is to be loved in any way and at any time – even the smallest amount is enough for him. He loves all and will do anything to see us happy and safe in His love.

My emotions were very strong during baptism. It is something I will never forget. It is a comfort knowing there are so many who have faith and believe in the priesthood, the Church – the sons and daughters of God – and, of course, God as a personal friend. I (also) find Mother Mary to be a comfort to me, particularly since my baptism.

Jesus stated that the kingdom was already here, just that we have not seen it yet. It is a matter of perception. A vital key to understanding anything in this world has been provided for us by His infinite mercy. I feel my heart grow stronger as each day passes and it is beating well. Thank you for the gift of baptism.

My own experiences in life have become very wonderful even through the darkest times for I know with no doubt now, Christ is Risen. I have the utmost respect for Achen, and pray his mind and spirit continue in the peace and Love of God and the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: John, at the age of 40, was baptized at Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in February 2006.



Rachele Garrett – ERITREA, and daughter Cianna – UNITED STATES

My name is Rachele and my family and I have been involved with the Madison Orthodox Mission in Madison for about four years now.

Our Orthodox Mission in Madison has served many purposes. It has been a place of worship, and has enriched the lives of the Coptic Eritrean people who live in the area. Father John has always made himself available to perform any and all services that would meet the Eritrean community religious needs.

Some of the services that are greatly appreciated by the Eritreans have been baptisms, healing services, educational classes on the Orthodox faith, and many others.

The church has been a great place for us to socialize after the sermons, and share our native traditional foods. His strict and dedicated following of the Orthodox church calendar, special observations for fasting periods and other great details he always adheres to in conducting his services is what makes him stand out, and the reason the Eritrean people rejoice in having him be here.

Although Father John has other commitments besides the caring of the church, one would never know that when looking at how he pays great attention to details in keeping the church functioning.

He does home visits to the sick, visits people in hospitals, and the list can go on and on. God has given him the ability and the strength to do the impossible.

Both Father John and Teresa were available to my family in a very personal way. When my mother (Hiuet Vitali)

died, Father John was contacted, and he was immediately available to perform the pre-burial traditional services that were very important to my mother's beliefs and the family.

When my daughter and I moved into a new home Father John and Teresa came over at the house warming and blessed our home.

Teresa never tires and always responds to people who need rides getting to church, even if they live a great distance away from the church. She has done that a number of times for us when we did not have transportation available, and I have seen her do it for others Eritreans and non-Eritrean alike.

She has taken the time to introduce my daughter to doing volunteer work in the community the first year we met and continued every year. She recently wrote a very nice long and detailed letter of recommendation for my daughter for a UW summer work shop we believe will be great for her.

Again, as with Father John's contributions to this community, the list can go on and on for Teresa as well. She is an integral part of the church support and I know for a fact our church would not be the same without her great dedication and commitment.

Both Father John and Teresa are very giving of themselves without ever expecting anything in return. They are just happy to do God's work and to be of service to this community.

It would leave a big gap in the lives of Eritrean people if the Orthodox mission was not available in this community.



Suset Monat and her father Zerkghi Ghebremichael – ERITREA, and daughters Naomi, Eliana, and Seraphima – UNITED STATES

We would like to express the meaning that Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in Madison, Wisconsin has to our family.



My name is Suset Monat and my father is Zerkghi Ghebremichael. We came to the US in the 1990s from East Africa. Back home we are from a very devout Orthodox background, in fact my grandfather was an Orthodox priest.

Until we found Father John Paprock and the Orthodox Mission we had nowhere to practice and worship in our traditional manner. Then in 2003 we met Father John when my mother was ill and he blessed and prayed for my mother and our family through that difficult time.



After my mother (Meaza Misghera) died, death my father and I began to attend services with Father John every Sunday and sometimes weekdays and on all holidays. My children have been welcomed by the Mission and we have found something truly wonderful that is very important to us.

The Mission is a high priority in my father's life. He attends services regularly and considers the parish

family as his own family. The weekly service is central to his spiritual life and he is very dedicated to the Orthodox faith. We look forward to continuing our participation in the Holy Transfiguration Mission in the future here in Madison.



Eternal memory...

Eric Ervin was a poet and a musician from Texas who performed everything from Rap to Gospel. He was a veteran of the Gulf War. Raised in the African-American Baptist church, he was fascinated by the traditions African and Coptic (Egyptian) Christians have practiced since the fourth century. Having undergone a heart transplant, he moved to Madison to be near our veterans' hospital. He converted to Orthodoxy and was a beloved member of our Mission. In April 2004, he died suddenly at the age of 28 due to complications of his heart disease.



Diana Johnson, an American from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, had strong connections to the African-American community there and had been well-respected in Jazz circles for many years. An artist and writer, she loved and respected all people. She was attracted to the mystical truths of Orthodoxy, and drawn to the multicultural, multiethnic parish of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in particular. Raised Catholic, Diana converted to the Orthodox faith shortly before she passed away in May 2004.



Because of John-Brian Achen's service to Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission – as well as his chaplaincy at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics and HospiceCare – he has ministered to many who have passed away over the years. *Eternal memory* to life-long Orthodox for whom Achen has provided traditional Orthodox funerals and/or memorials:

Hiuet Vitali
Sobby Matthew
Dusa Ciganovich
John Scocos
Nicholas Spyros
Constance Sahagian

Meaza Misghera
Helen Maserjian
John Chocas
Sofia Gobena
John Khoury

Eternal memory to those baptized/chrismat-ed on their death beds at the hospital:

Peggy Martin

Donna Marie Moore

Eternal memory to the six infants that received emergency baptism at the hospital before their death.

May God grant peace to the departed according to his abundant mercy.

Services and celebrations at our Mission ... and 'Best Wishes' from around the world



MEN OF THE PARISH LISTEN TO ACHEN'S EASTER HOMILY.

Respected Father,

Congratulations for completing service over the past 20 years (of) priesthood.

You are a blessing for many especially for our Church as a whole.

May God Almighty bless you and family abundantly.

With prayers,

T.M. Cherian
Saudi Arabia

I learned that Thirumeni was always helpful to each and every person and that he was gentle and kind to us ... (John-Brian Achen) taught us more about Thirumeni and his stories.

Leena Daniel
Chicago, Ill.

NOTE: *Leena, age 15, is a member of St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church in Bellwood, Ill. She attended the April 2008 memorial service where members of the church and Achens including John-Brian achen spoke of Makarios Thirumeni (of blessed memory).*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

I would like to acknowledge that this message ("Preparing for our Resurrection") was Amazing. With the others as well, I just want to add that I appreciate all of this inspiration that is given to all the brothers and sisters in Christ.

Your sister, Elisabeth

NOTE: *Elsa Telke, of Eritrea, had downloaded this sermon from Monday, April 21, 2008, at <http://frjohbrian.blogspot.com/>. This sermon continues the teachings about the transformative power of Orthodox Christian fasting and healing as preparation of the life to come.*



LITTLE ELIANA PARTAKES IN THE HOLY QURBANA

Dear Achen,

Thank you for the sermon (online). It is very useful for spiritual seekers who struggle through "the dark nights of the soul" as well as those who are on the path who can expect such periods of crisis.

Sincerely,
Joseph Thomas
Dubai



COUSINS YONATAN AND KIDUS ABEBE ARE BAPTIZED INTO THE FAITH DURING A DOUBLE CEREMONY.

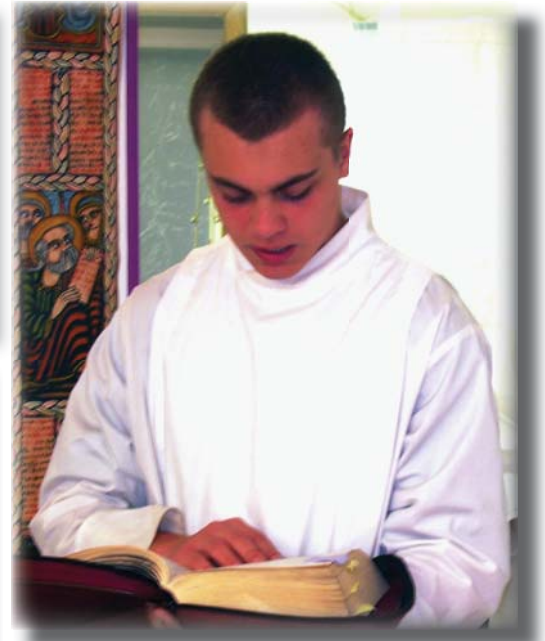
I have followed the writings of Rev. Fr. John Brian on the internet, mainly on the online community in ICON, and have been very much blessed and have learnt from him about Holy Orthodoxy. Also we have been working on a prayer book project (still to be completed) and Achen has been very helpful in researching Biblical references and background history of authors of prayers in the project.

I have also heard Achen's podcasts and have recommended them to friends. I have known Achen for a long time through his messages online and I am grateful for Achen's ministry on the internet.

I have known about the mission in Madison and hope and pray it is gathered completely into the fold of the Malankara Church at the earliest. I thank the Lord for the vision given to Mar Makarios of blessed memory for the work done with initiating the mission parishes into St. Gregorios Mission and I hope the Holy Spirit works powerfully through the weaknesses of us humans to embrace the mission wholeheartedly at the earliest, so that the Lord's name is glorified.

Hope to come and meet the mission in Madison someday, and God willing, worship the Lord together. Please pray for me and my family.

Will keep in prayers,
Mathew Samuel
Albany, NY



CHRISTOPHER, AN ACOLYTE, READS THE DAY'S EPISTLE..

Dear Rev. Paprock:

Greetings from a long lost prodigal son!
... A few months after the loss of our daughter, I was critically sick ... Even now I have not totally regained my full health ... In addition we have been traveling to Ethiopia quite often after my recovery.

I am sorry that we did not meet when you were in town here in the Washington, DC area. Please let know if you were to come here by any chance. We would love to meet you again.

We are eternally grateful for the assistance you, your wife, and your church community gave us at one of the most critical time in our life. Please give our best regards to your family.

With very warm personal wishes,
Temesgien Gobena
Washington, DC

NOTE: Temesgien Gobena's daughter, Sofia, died unexpectedly at the age of 38 in June 2003. John-Brian Achen ministered to her family at the University of Wisconsin Hospital.

Sophia was buried at Qeraneo Medhane Alem Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In her memory, her parents have set up the Sofia Gobena Foundation, at www.sofiagobena.org.

My name is Luke Podiyan, originally from Kerala, India. I belong to St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox church of Greater Washington DC. I serve in the altar for long time. I attend the church regularly.

I used to watch John-Brian Achen's sermon through ICON postings. Whenever I had problems, I ask for his beloved advice through phone. Achen prayed for me my tough times. I believe Achen is still praying for my difficulties at work. Thank you very much for the sincere prayers.

Luke Podiyan
Washington DC



CAROL MILLER, AN AMERICAN FROM MADISON, WAS BAPTIZED INTO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN NOVEMBER 2005, AT THE AGE OF 34. SHE WAS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN HOSPITAL, ON WHAT WAS EXPECTED TO BE HER DEATH BED. SHE NOW RESIDES AT A LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY IN NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN.

Dear and Reverend Achen,

I had an opportunity to listen to a few of the online sermons. It's a really great service for those who are unable to hear the sermons directly. It was definitely a good idea to integrate the sermons on a blog, providing opportunity for feedback and easy access.

I don't know if you recall, but we met at the St. Gregorios conference in Philadelphia last year. Thank you for the selfless services you render to the church.

With Love and Prayers,

Jason Kora
Tampa, Florida

Thanks, my dear Rev. Fr. John Brian,

I am happy to accept your faith statements, because faith is a core thing to our life. We live in the world by faith. You may say, how? Simple explanation. We walk on the straight by faith because God made it strong which didn't swallow us. We get many reasons to appreciate God but we don't use them, you know the reasons. We are self-dependent without God, as a result we don't praise him.

May God bless you as much as you seek him.

Your best brother
Efrem Embaye
Columbus, Ohio

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It was good to join Achen and the Holy Transfiguration congregation again, although only briefly.

Derek Goddard
Barbados



AFTER MANY WEEKS OF FASTING AND A SOLEMN GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE, THE MOOD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EASTER SERVICE IS SOMBER.

BUT THEN, ACHEN ANNOUNCES THE WONDERFUL NEWS: THAT CHRIST IS RISEN. ONE BY ONE, THE CONGREGANTS LIGHT ONE ANOTHERS' CANDLES UNTIL THE ROOM GLOWS IN CELEBRATION.

"CHRIST IS RISEN!" SAYS ACHEN, AND THE JOYFUL REPLY IS, "HE IS RISEN INDEED!" WITH BELLS AND SINGING, A PROCESSION FOLLOWS.



THE CHURCH WOMEN EXCITEDLY AWAIT THE START OF THE EASTER SERVICE ... AND THE END OF A LONG FAST.



MISSION ELDER ZERZGHI GHEBREMICHAEL'S GRAND-DAUGHTERS, VISITING FROM OUT OF TOWN, GOT "CROWNS" FROM ACHEN ON PALM SUNDAY.

My dear Achen,

Trust all is well. I am glad you have taken up a new ministry. It will be a blessing for all who hear it.

Just to let you know that (the OVBS Training Camp) will be held again at St. Gregorios Oak Park ... I hope that you and some of your parish members will be able to attend and participate. This year's theme is "Rejoice in the Lord" from Phil 3:1 ... Regards to the family!

With love and prayers,
Benny Semassan
Chicago, Illinois

Hi Father,

The group really benefits from your sermons. Pray for me,

Nick Antonious
Houston, Texas

NOTE: Nick, a Coptic, moderates an internet forum on African Orthodoxy. John-Brian Achen's sermons are available for podcast or download at <http://frjohbrian.blogspot.com>.



FAVIN, THE THIRD DAUGHTER OF AARON ABRAHA AND ABREHET GEBRU OF ETHIOPIA, WAS PRESENTED TO THE CHAPEL IN FEBRUARY 2006.

Father ...

I want to know more about your ministry. If you would like to send information to me I will be so much happy with you. ...

Thank you for your prayer and blessings on me. I love you. Please pray for me continuously. I do pray for you. I am in search of truth. I am a student of the Holy Bible.

Thanks Father. With regards,

Reji Chacko
Kerala, India

Fr. John Brian,

Thank you so much for these precious materials.

I have heard that the book "The Book of the Church Festivals" has lot of the prayers for these important occasions, but they are back ordered.

Will keep you and the mission in my prayers.

God Bless,
Sam Pedro
Nashville, Tennessee

NOTE: Sam, a Malayalee, had requested John-Brian Achen to send him the Liturgy for Good Friday and Easter translated into English.



ACHEN VISITS WITH THE YOUTH AFTER QURBANA DURING A VISIT TO MAR GREGORIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CLEVELAND, OHIO.

John-Brian Achen,

You are doing a wonderful work in bringing the traditions and faith of one of the earliest Churches of Christendom to the awareness of the West.

With Prayers and Love,

Joseph E. Thomas, Ph.D.
Willowbrook, Ill.

Hi John Achen,

Thank you for your prayers and blessings on my birthday. Your work and life is an inspiration for me, I thank God for that.

God continue to bless you, your family and your ministry.

In Christ,

Thomas Ninan Achen
New Delhi

Dear Rev. Fr. John Brian,

Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

With great hope,

+Rev. Dn. John Pappan
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I would like to appreciate the efforts of Rev. Fr. Paprock and his missionary work he is leading.

His article on Makarios Thirumeni is excellent and gives a clear picture of the life of H.G and how HG considered everyone as equal. May his prayers be a strong fortress for us.

Dr. Sen Kallumpuram
St. Thomas's IOC London

NOTE: Dr. Rajan Mathew, for Light of Life, sent this feedback to John-Brian Achen regarding his article, "TRIBUTE TO H.G. THOMAS MAR MAKARIOS METROPOLITAN," which can be found at www.lightoflife.com.

In the tribute, John-Achen writes: "I had never seen an Orthodox hierarch with such confidence and such love for the future of the church. His vision was for our church to be more spiritually minded, culturally enlightened and inter-personally sensitive. He wanted us to be a leading example to the world of the goodness of Christian heritage, embracing the fullness of the Holy Orthodox Church and reaching out to those who do not know her."



CHRISTINE CHACKO ENJOYS THE EASTER FEAST.

One of several articles about our mission that have been published in the local newspapers

Orthodox Christmas: A Celebration of Christ's Birth

By Danya Hooker
Wisconsin State Journal
January 8, 2007

While many Christians have already packed away their Christmas decorations and disposed of their trees, millions of Orthodox Christians waited until early Sunday to celebrate Christ's birth.

In Madison, 15 Oriental Orthodox Christians gathered at Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission Parish Chapel, 6205 University Ave., at midnight for a night of celebration and worship.

Women arrived draped in white – the color of purity – took off their shoes and knelt to pray before the altar. A thick fog of sweet-smelling frankincense permeated the small room, lit only by candles.

For two hours, worshipers led by the Rev. John-Brian Paprock celebrated their savior's birth according to ancient Christian traditions.

The service "is the oldest continuous expression of the Christian church," said Paprock's wife, Teresa. "When you come to a service, you're experiencing a tradition and liturgy that has existed, literally, for 2,000 years. That's what makes it so interesting."

Worshipers gathered in a circle around a makeshift bonfire – representing the fire the shepherds sat around when they were told of Jesus' birth and one-by-one threw incense and



Rev. John-Brian Paprock leads a procession of Orthodox Christians through a tradition of sprinkling frankincense over a flame symbolizing the fire the shepherds were gathered around when an angel told them of Jesus' birth. The service was part of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission Parish's midnight service Sunday in celebration of the Orthodox Christmas.

– PHOTO BY ANDY MANIS

palm fronds left over from Palm Sunday into the fire.

Nearly every aspect of the service is symbolic of the environment of the Nativity. Breathing the same incense, surrounding the fire and hearing the bells ring – representing angels – are some of the steps in becoming more like God, John-Brian Paprock told worshipers. "Salvation is not a one-shot deal. It's a process, as we become more like God," Paprock said.

All Orthodox Christian churches recognize Dec. 25 as Christmas, but a disagreement about exactly when that date occurs has resulted in some churches celebrating the holiday 13 days later. Those celebrating on Dec. 25 follow the Gregorian calendar used by most of the world. But a few churches have opted to stick with the older Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind the Gregorian.

"I think there's a certain stubbornness in accepting what you've been given as truth. I think that's really a fundamental of Orthodoxy, that we honor what our spiritual ancestors have given us," Paprock said. "There's this idea that we're continuing, not starting over all the time. ... Sometimes a calendar becomes a major way of doing that."

Paprock estimated there are 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and 20 million in the U.S.

Paprock's small congregation of mostly Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants practices under Oriental Orthodox traditions, the original Christian practices of North Africa, the Middle East and India.

The Madison church's existence – it's one of only a handful outside major Midwestern cities – was surprising to many of the immigrants who came here expecting to either have to travel great distances or forgo going to church.

"I was really excited," said Banchiygezu Wolde,

who immigrated to Madison from Ethiopia in 1999, of when she learned of Paprock's church. Wolde said the only major difference between Paprock's services and those she attended in Ethiopia is the language.

The influx of Ethiopian or Eritrean immigrants to the church was an unexpected but pleasant surprise, Teresa Paprock said.

"We thought we were going to be a mission of American converts," she said. Instead, the congregation is a diverse group representing different cultures, languages and backgrounds.

Because of the diversity of native languages in his congregation, John-Brian Paprock conducts services in English. And although that can pose problems at times, the diversity is a blessing, he told his congregation during the Christmas service.

"This is what's so great about our little mission. We are proof that God works regardless of our race, regardless of our language regardless of our culture."

*Thank you for learning about our Mission.
God bless you.*

On the cover: Robb, Geoffrey, Haben and Christopher participate in a Zuhoyo blessing with a ceremonial umbrella ... Christine holds a candle at Easter ... Kochamma stands in as Godmother during the baptism of Lydia Sium ... Some of the parish children gather after a service. **Right:** Acolytes and twin brothers, Mikias and Marcus, illuminate the Gospel reading.

Other than the Wisconsin State Journal reprint, the text and photos in this booklet have been provided by members and friends of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission, Madison, Wisconsin.

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