TO ALL THE FAITHFUL OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, 1997, HAS BEEN A YEAR OF CELEBRATION AND REJOICING IN OUR HOLY ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA. WE CELEBRATED THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR ARCHDIOCESE, THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR HOLY CROSS THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, AND THE PATRIARCHAL VISIT OF His ALL HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARBARO zurück

REFLECTING UPON THESE EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH IN AMERICA, YOUR DEPARTMENT OF STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY, WITH THE BLESSINGS OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP SPYRIDON, HAS PREPARED THE ’1998 CAMPAIGN PACKET’ ENTITLED, “THE TREE OF THE CROSS.” ENCLOSED ARE SEVERAL INSERTS THAT MAY BE DUPLICATED AND USED TO ASSIST YOU IN YOUR MINISTRY.

PRAYING THAT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST BLESS YOU WITH CONTINUED SERVICE TO HIS HOLY CHURCH, I REMAIN,

IN CHRIST’S SERVICE,

VERY REV. ARCHIMANDRITE J. GABRIEL KARAMBIS
DIRECTOR

OCTOBER, 1997
THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE
OF GOOD AND EVIL

"The Lord God took the man and put him in
the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the
Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat
of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the
knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the
day that you eat of it you shall die."' Genesis 2:15-17)

Everlasting life is the promise of our Heavenly
Father, and the fulfillment of Christian Stewardship.
Stewardship as established upon the Lord's command
is to choose good over evil.

Humankind, exalted above all of God's creation, having received reason, freedom,
and love, arrayed with His image and likeness, makes choices in his life. Choices that are
made in obedience and submission to God. St. Augustine has written: "Here was pride,
because man desired to be under his own authority than under God's; and a mockery of
what is holy, because he subjected himself to death; and spiritual adultery, because the
purity of the human soul was defiled through the persuasion of the serpent; and theft,
because they made use of the forbidden tree; and the love of acquisition, because he
desired more than was necessary to satisfy himself." The result of disobedience causes
a complete breakdown of moral and physical well being.

In Christian Stewardship we are freed in Christ. We express this freedom as
stewards of the Body of Christ, the Church. In this freedom we come to a choice, the
choice to follow what is godly or ungodly. Our stewardship dictates that we freely
choose to be faithful and obedient.

YOU MUST MAKE THE CHOICE TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL MINISTRIES OF
OUR CHURCH IN THE PARISH, THE DIOCESE, AND THE ARCHDIOCESE. ONLY BY
MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE DO WE FOLLOW WHAT IS GOOD AND PLEASING TO
GOD.
"And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre ... and bowed himself to the earth, and said, 'My Lord, if I have found favor in Your sight, do not pass by Your servant.'" (Genesis 18:1-3)

In this passage we are presented with an icon of the Holy Trinity. Known as the "Hospitality of Abraham" we see the stewardship offered by Abraham and Sarah to the three angels. We are familiar with the story of Abraham and Sarah as recorded in Genesis 18:1-3. It is in this passage that we are given the example of hospitality, a kind and generous manner in which we behave.

Christian Orthodox Stewardship calls us to be kind and generous in our ministry. Reflecting upon the accomplishments of our Holy Archdiocese of America these past 75 years we realize that - Yes, we are kind and generous! The accomplishments of our parishes, the ministry of the Philoptochos, locally and nationally, and the generous work of Leadership 100 attests to this affirmation.

Can we do more? Again we answer - Yes! The faithful of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America have been blessed with an abundance of God's blessings. When we accept the opportunity to be kind and generous, we put our faith into action. As Abraham and Sarah received the three angels and ministered to them, we also give ourselves so that our children and household may "keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice . . . " (Genesis 18:19).

The story of Abraham and Sarah does not stop here.

This story, however, has an even more profound meaning with our understanding of Christian Stewardship. It is a story that explains the Tree of the Cross.
THE TREE OF THE CROSS
INFINITE SACRIFICE

This story begins in early Biblical times, in the era of Abraham and Sarah. When the angels fulfilled the purpose of their visit and departed for Sodom and Gomorrah, they gave their three staffs to Abraham.

Following the destruction of these cities and Lot's sinning with his daughters (Genesis 19), Lot went to Abraham. He confessed his sin to Abraham and asked how he might repent of his ungodly ways. Abraham gave Lot the three staffs of the angels instructing him to plant them in the area of Jerusalem. Once planted, the staffs were to be watered with water from the Jordan River. If they blossomed, that would be a sign from Heaven that God had forgiven his transgression. Lot carried out Abraham's instructions. He planted the staffs in a valley outside Jerusalem and brought water from the Jordan river. Although it was difficult to transport the water, Lot persevered and watered the staffs. The staffs blossomed and grew into a triple tree: a pine, a cypress, and a cedar.

This particular tree was cut down in the time of King Solomon so that it could be used as timber for the building of the Temple of Jerusalem. The beams, however, did not fit anywhere and were put aside as useless. It was these very beams that were used to make the Cross on which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was crucified.

The Lord's sacrifice on the Cross is an unending sacrifice. In the Crucifixion of Christ our Lord, all barriers are broken down, humankind is elevated or rather, restored to that "ancient beauty" by His Glorious Resurrection.

As Stewards of the Cross we must constantly be aware of God's Divine Plan of Salvation. We see in the sources of our Faith, Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, the effort God has put forth to redeem humankind. Stewardship that is godly and faithful is our response offered in thanksgiving and praise: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)
FELLOWSHIP

"THE CROSS IS THE GUARDIAN
OF THE WHOLE EARTH;
THE CROSS IS THE BEAUTY OF
THE CHURCH...
THE CROSS IS THE SUPPORT OF
THE FAITHFUL.
THE CROSS IS THE GLORY OF
ANGELS... 99

Christ completed His redemptive mission through His person, teaching, death, and resurrection. Believing in Him enables us to enjoy the blessings of abundant life - true fellowship with God by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For the Orthodox Christian steward this is the life of the Church. We gather as the body of Christ to participate in the saving work of Christ.

In accordance with Orthodox Christian teachings, genuine Christian living is a synergy, a fellowship, a cooperation, between man and God. We are called to freely respond to our Heavenly Father in managing our TIME, TALENTS, AND TREASURE!

This is not achieved merely by one's personal commitment, but by real conviction made when the baptized faithful acknowledge and pledge their lives to Christ. It is with this type of fervent faith that we are united to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we "commit ourselves and each other and our whole life to Christ our God, " we become a family of believers placing our trust in Christ. This fellowship, strengthened by the Lord's sacrifice on the Cross, enables us to accept: "The Cross ... guardian of the whole earth; ... the Cross ... beauty of the Church; ... the Cross ... support of the faithful, ... The Cross ... glory of angels..."
RESPONSIBILITY:
PERSONAL & COMMUNAL

High on a hill, majestically overlooking the city of Boston, stands our Holy Cross School of Theology. It is here that young laymen offer their first response to the Lord's call to become "fishers of men." Many young men have entered the doors of the Administration Building and noticed a beautiful marble wall with an inscription in Greek. If the young seminarian is unable to read the Greek, he is quickly told its meaning and passage: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me," (Mark 8:34b). From that moment, a personal commitment already made to pursue the Holy Priesthood is strengthened by the power of the Cross. The commitment, however, is no longer personal, it becomes "communal!"

We are all called to take up our cross and follow the Lord. Even our baptismal cross was placed upon us with these same words of the Holy Gospel. By taking up our cross we are expected become responsible stewards of the Tree of the Cross. Responsibility, however, requires a response" that is both personal and communal.

St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians writes: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. . . " (12:12-13). Having been baptized in the same baptismal font we are united to the body of Christ and thus, one family! Just as we accept the responsibilities to be conscientious parents, we also come to realize the obligations we must fulfill to our Church family.

The Orthodox Christian steward puts forth a response worthy of the Orthodox family. If you have never gathered your family to discuss your response to Christ and His Church, do so now. Make this family gathering a regular activity to discuss how we can respond to our Christian Orthodox Faith. Your personal response will affect the entire Church - the Body of Jesus Christ!