

Synod News*

Annual Clergy Conference

With the blessing of Metropolitan Cyprian, the annual clergy conference of the American Exarchate of our Church was held on Saturday, October 6, and Sunday, October 7, 2001, at the St. John the Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, IA. Fifteen clergymen and some one hundred lay people attended the two-day conference, which began on Saturday afternoon with a series of talks and a question-and-answer period. The Saturday session was introduced by Protopresbyter Raphael Abraham, pastor of the St. John the Baptist Church. Archimandrite Akakios, Abbot of the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, then delivered a lecture on "Orthodox Spiritual Life in America: An Evaluative 'Reality Check.'" His Grace, Bishop Auxentios of Photiki spoke next. His talk, entitled, "Some General Guidelines on a Proper Understanding of the Notions of Heresy, Anti-Ecumenism, and Apocalyptic Thinking in the Orthodox Church," was followed with an address by His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, with the title, "'Ο οὖν ὁ Θεὸς συνέθευξεν, ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωρίζτω' ('What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder') (St. Matthew 19:6)." During the Saturday conference session, the accomplished Byzantine choir of the St. John the Baptist Church also sang several hymns to the *Theotokos* in English, Arabic, and Greek, and the parish served complimentary Mediterranean pastries and coffee to the participants at the intermission period. (See **below**).





At left, above (left to right), Reader George Chee, Archbishop Chrysostomos, Bishop Auxentios, and Server Hunna Abraham. At right, above, Hierarchs with Protopresbyter Benedict Markley.



Gathered Exarchate clergy. Not pictured are Father Demetrios Sarlakes and the Rev. Dr. Gregory Telepneff.

The Sunday session of the conference began with Matins, followed by an Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. At the Divine Liturgy, young Hunna Abraham, seven years of age and the son of Father John Abraham (assistant pastor of St. John's parish), was blessed to serve in the Altar. Mr. George Chee, who recently relocated with his wife to Etna, CA, was also Tonsured a Reader and assigned to serve the Sts. Cyprian and Justina parish in Etna. As well, the Rev. Dr. Benedict Markley, pastor of the St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco Church in Medina, OH, was elevated, at the request of Archbishop Chrysostomos and with the blessing of Metropolitan Cyprian, to the rank of Protopresbyter. **(See photographs on previous page.)**

During the *agape* meal following the Divine Liturgy, His Grace, Bishop Auxentios complimented those who had been blessed for service and elevated, during the Liturgy, for their accomplishments. He exhorted Server Hunna to progress in piety and purity; complimented the newly-Tonsured Reader George for the excellent impression that he and his wife—the parents of ten children—have made on the Orthodox community in Etna; and praised the newly-elevated Protopresbyter Benedict for his indefatigable efforts in building a beautiful Church, which His Grace described as a “literal jewel,” and his unselfish service to his flock and fidelity to Metropolitan Cyprian and our Synod of Bishops.

The Faithful then wished “Many Years” to His Grace, Bishop Auxentios, who is celebrating this year the tenth anniversary of his Consecration to the Episcopacy, and to Father Raphael, who is celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood. A beautiful set of vestments, embroidered at the Convent of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess in Etna, CA, was presented to His Grace, along with gifts to Father Raphael, Father Benedict, Reader George, and Server Hunna. Archbishop Chrysostomos closed the activities with an expression of his gratitude to Father Raphael and his Presbytera, Father John and his Presbytera, and the parish Faithful of the beautiful St. John the Baptist Church “...for their sacrifices and efforts in making the annual clergy conference of our Exarchate so successful and memorable.”

* Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (2002), pp. 32-34.