



■ By the power, protection, and guidance of the Precious Cross

## Another Significant and Fruitful Pastoral Visit to the Holy Diocese of Stockholm September 18 - 23, 2015 (Old Style)

**O**n the **Thursday** after the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, September 18, 2015 (Old Style), we travelled yet again, in our capacity as *Locum Tenens*, to our Church's newly established Diocese in Stockholm.

**With** the blessing and prayers of His Beatitude, Archbishop Kallinikos and of all of the members of our Holy Synod, this new pastoral endeavor proved to be of particular importance, by the power of the Precious Cross, under the protection of the *Theotokos*, and through the intercessions of the Holy God-crowned Monarchs Constantine and Helen, Equals to the Apostles, and of the Holy Nun-Martyr Philothei of Athens.

● **G**lory to God for all things!

**Throughout** our sojourn in the missionary field of this beautiful country, the splendid weather was our constant and cheering companion. Springtime in autumn!

**Accompanying** us again this time were the Reverend Father Jiří Ján (Rector of the Church of the Ascension in Patras, Greece) and Subdeacon Antonios Hagiokyprianites.



**Since** we were unable to participate in the annual Patronal Feast

of the Diocese of Stockholm on May 21 (commemoration of Sts. Constantine and Helen), owing to our prolonged absence for health reasons, it was indeed necessary to fill a pastoral void.

**In** view of the constant growth and progress of our missionary witness in Sweden, it has been decided that three pastoral visits should take place over the coming year: in September, January, and May.

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**With** these thoughts in mind, we arrived in Sweden on Thursday, September 18, 2015 (Old Style).

● **The** heartfelt and sincere embrace of love reinvigorated our zeal, and the emotion of His Grace, Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis (86 years old!), increased it yet further. The presence of Swedes, Greeks, Russians, Serbs, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Syrians, Ethiopians, Somalis, Palestinians, and Iraqi Orthodox, "of all the nations," underscored the fact that our Holy Faith transcends ethnicity and nationality, and also its profoundly unifying nature.

● **We** had the blessing of liturgizing on Friday (September 19) at the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens, in Villberga, with the



participation of a small group of our faithful and the convent's serving Priest, Father Anders Åkerström. A light fasting meal followed, which simultaneously constituted a rich spiritual banquet of edifying

discussions and an exchange of views regarding the present and future of our witness in Scandinavia. The Convent of St. Philothei's various projects are moving forward, and perhaps in the near future it will have the capacity to house a larger sisterhood. The presence of the convent, under the direction of Mother Magdalene (a native Swede), is of especial interest, in that it increasingly draws the attention of well-disposed Lutheran clergy, nuns, and laypeople.

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● **On Saturday**, September 20 (Old Style, the commemoration of St. Evstathios and those with him), the Bishop's residence once again became a vibrant and multilingual beehive: Ninth Hour, a short memorial service, Resurrectional Great Vespers, Small Compline, the prayers before Holy Communion, and, finally, a light meal, carefully prepared by the multi-ethnic parishioners, to which everyone was invited.

**During** a meeting with the Priests, we dealt at length with the matter of the constantly increasing presence of Syrian Orthodox Christians, in particular in Western Sweden, and how to approach them from a pastoral point of view, through the prism of Genuine Orthodoxy.

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● **On Sunday**, September 21 (Old Style), the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen was once again bursting with life and joy in the Holy Spirit.

**We concelebrated** with the Reverend Presbyters, Fathers Anders (Swedish), Stefanos (Swedish), Jiří (Czech), and Spyridon (Syrian), Hierodeacon Father Theochares (a Syrian who received his monastic formation at the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina in Greece), and a number of Subdeacons, accompanied by a multi-ethnic choir. ● **A** moving moment: the Creed and the Lord's Prayer were recited beautifully and rhythmically by the entire congregation, led by the choir director.

● **Bishop Johannes** was seated next to the Bishop's Throne in his wheelchair, but eventually, exhausted by his painful disability, he had to retire to his cell, where he communed of the Immaculate Mysteries.

● **The majority** of the faithful also communed of the Mystery of Life—a great blessing!

**An Agape** meal followed, as is the custom each Sunday. We were then able to meet with the faithful on an individual basis, reading prayers over them, hearing confessions, and offering words of en-



couragement and consolation.

It was, as it were, a multicolored and multifaceted mosaic, illumined by the mystical light of the Cross.



● **On Sunday evening**, from 6:30-8:30, we

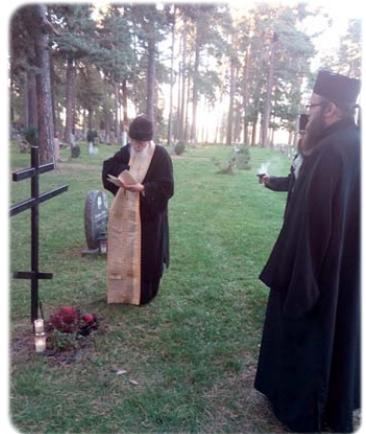
were vouchsafed an exceptionally edifying parish *Synaxis*

(gathering), with several heterodox in attendance. The faithful were profoundly affected by the detailed, yet simple discussion of the "foolishness" of the Cross as an essential element of the Orthodox Evangelical ethos. The wide-ranging discussion was enhanced by the assistance of the clergy in attendance and the patient translation into Swedish by Mother Magdalene from the Convent of St. Philothei.

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● **On Monday**, September 22 (Old Style), our contact with the faithful continued, including a meeting that may prove to be of great import for the course of our work in Sweden and our strong anti-ecumenical witness, in the midst of a society that is becoming increasingly degenerate and de-Christianized, with a Lutheran veneer but profoundly secularized.

● **That afternoon**, we visited Stockholm's Woodland Cemetery (Skogskyrkogården), which is truly an astonishing place in terms of landscape, dimensions, and organization; it is, in fact, a UNESCO World Heritage Center. One section has been reserved for Orthodox Christians, where the grave of Mother Parthenia († 1999) is located. Before being tonsured a nun, Mother Parthenia—known at that time as Matushka Monika—was the faithful and charming wife of the future Bishop Johannes. Both the Trisagion served at her grave



and the conversation that followed, as we strolled under the towering and shady trees lining the pathways of this immense cemetery, made for a beautiful and moving experience.

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● **Tuesday**, September 23 (Old Style), was the day of our return journey to our blessed homeland of Greece.

**Our** brethren in Sweden accompanied us to the airport, as always eager to help, joyful, and grateful, with the sunlit and heartening autumnal Swedish landscape as a backdrop. This in contrast to the Greek landscape, which has persisted in being so grey the last few years, from every point of view. We look forward with

hope to our next visit to Sweden in January of 2016.

**Various** other matters of interest:

**a. A** list of Scandinavian Saints has been drawn up and awaits final editing before being published on the websites of the Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle and of the Holy Diocese of Stockholm.

● **T**he list contains thirty-eight Saints (as well as a group of fifty monastics and sixty-five laypeople) that lived between

the ninth and sixteenth centuries. Several Icons of local Saints have already been painted.

**b. It** has been determined that the Feast Day of the *Synaxis* of All Saints of Scandinavia should fall on the Sunday after the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, every September.

**c. T**he area behind the Bishop's residence in Stockholm, where Bishop Johannes will eventually be laid to rest, has been suitably landscaped. Over his grave, we hope to build a Chapel dedicated to All Saints of Scandinavia.

**d. S**ome initial steps towards the creation of a men's Hesychasterion (small monastery), which would also be dedicated to All Saints of Scandinavia, are underway.



**e. At** the parish Church in honor of the Dormition of the Theotokos, in Uppsala, a very beautiful Icon of the Pantokrator has been placed on the ceiling. This exceptional gift of our Lord is the work of the Icon Studio housed at the Bishop's residence in Stockholm.

**G**lory to God for all things! Hope maketh not ashamed....

*September 23, 2015 (Old Style)*  
*† Conception of St. John the Forerunner*  
*† Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle*

