



■ [Visit to the Holy Diocese of Stockholm](#)

Winter Pastoral Ministry in Sweden

February 16-21, 2024 (Old Style)

Before the beginning of the Holy and Great Fast, His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, with the blessing of the Holy Synod, made his customary winter pastoral visit to our Church's small flock in Sweden, in order to take part in the Patronal Feast of the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens.

■ The previous week (February 7-14, 2024 [Old Style]), with the blessing of Their Eminences, Metropolitan Photios of Demetrias and Metropolitan Cyprian, Father George Shahla Buhaous (who hails from Lebanon and currently is the serving Priest at the Church of the Venerable Forerunner in Volos, Greece), had visited Stockholm for the purpose of meeting with and catechizing a group of faithful from the Patriarchate of Antioch who wished to join the community of Genuine Orthodox in Sweden. They were received into our Church on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee according to canonical order and participated in the Divine Liturgy concelebrated by Fathers Anders Åkerström, Stefanos Jaerpenberg, and George Shahla Buhaous.



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On Thursday, February 16 (Old Style), Metropolitan Cyprian and his travelling companions arrived at noon in this beautiful northern land, which greeted them with very cold weather!



Following the reception of the Hierarchy at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, in Vårberg, Stockholm, His Eminence conveyed the best wishes of the Hierarchs and faithful in Greece, and expressed his wish that the following days of fellowship be

spiritually edifying for all involved.

Father Anders thanked the Metropolitan for his love and the sacrifices he makes to visit the small flock of the North so frequently, despite his many duties and responsibilities. He also spoke about the joyful event of Father George's visit and the reception of our Arabic-speaking brothers and sisters into our local Orthodox community.

Everyone then went to the grave of Bishop Johannes of blessed memory († July 5, 2020), located behind the Church, where Metropolitan Cyprian served a *Trisagion* for the repose of this dearly beloved spiritual Father of our brethren in Sweden and founder of our Mission there. Everyone then sat down to a light meal.

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On Friday, February 17 (Old Style), Metropolitan Cyprian made his customary visit to the Orthodox section of the Skogskyrkogården cemetery in Stockholm, where, together with our Priests and Hierodeacon Theochares, he served *Trisagia* at the grave of the ever-memorable Mother Parthenia and those of several other of our departed faithful.



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On Saturday, February 18 (Old Style), Orthros and a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy were celebrated in honor of St. Philothei of Athens (transferred to this day from February 19) at the Convent dedicated to her in Villberga, Grillby, with the par-

ticipation of our clergy and a large group of faithful.

At the end of service, the nuns served everyone an *agape* meal, during which Father Anders spoke about the popular piety of Swedish Christians until the middle of the seventeenth century, as evidenced by the use among the peasantry of [runic calendars](#)—perpetual calendars usually carved onto wooden staffs with symbols denoting Sundays, major and minor feast days, fasting days, etc.



Metropolitan Cyprian then spoke about pious habits that families can cultivate, which teach children reverence and the ethos of the Church in practice. In this way, our life is sanctified and we protect ourselves from the spirit of the world.



One such practice, he continued, is to set aside Sunday as a day of rest. We keep the Lord's day primarily by going to Church and receiving Holy Communion, then by praying, reading spiritual books, spending time with our family, and visiting the sick and lonely.

We know of laypeople who make conscious efforts to spend their Sundays in this way and can witness to how God greatly blesses those who keep the day of the Lord holy.

That afternoon, Resurrectional Great Vespers, in conjunction with the Feast of St. Philothei, was served in Greek and Swedish at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, followed by the Small Compline.

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On the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, February 19 (Old Style), the Midnight Office, Orthros, and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy were celebrated at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen. Metropolitan Cyprian presided, assisted by Father Anders Åkerström, Father Stefanos Jaerpenberg, Hierodeacon Father Theochares, and Subdeacons Raphael and Chrysovalantis Marinis.

In his homily on the Gospel passage, His Eminence spoke about the exceptional theological richness of our Lord's masterful narrative:



The Sunday of the Prodigal Son could justifiably be called the Sunday of the Merciful God: the Prodigal Son, when he came to himself and repented, had in mind to ask his Father to accept him as one of His hired servants; that is, he set conditions on which his Father would accept

him back. But the Father accepted him unconditionally and gave orders to celebrate his return.

Many of us have a wrong image of God. We think of Him as a jailer or a policeman, ready to punish us if we transgress one of His laws. God does not punish. God is a Father; He sometimes permits difficult things to happen in our lives, but in doing so He disciplines us, leading us to awareness, always out of love.

With the same love and humility with which He received His prodigal son, the Father then went out not to rebuke, but to beseech His elder son to enter and to rejoice with them over the return of his brother.

The elder son had always remained in the house of his Father, Who reminds him that “all that I have is thine.” But the elder son did not see things that way. He claimed that he had never received anything. Since he was not in loving communion with his Father, even though he lived in His house, he did not know his Father; he did not love Him.

In the parable, to be sure, the house symbolizes the Church and the Father is God. Perhaps some of us live in the “house” of the Church, like the elder son, with the feeling that a Christian life consists only of fulfilling certain duties—going to Church, fasting, praying, lighting a candle, giving alms now and then—and that by fulfilling such duties, we are given certain rights; that is, that our Father “owes” us the Kingdom of Heaven?

Perhaps some of us are embittered with God if something distressing happens in our lives and we ask God why He permitted it when we are “good Christians”? If we are not in loving communion with the Father, we will not feel God’s love in the tribulations and trials that He allows for our spiritual growth and perfection.

At the end of the festal Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Cyprian welcomed the group of our Arabic-speaking brothers and sisters who





had recently been received into our community. He then invited the faithful to venerate a portion of the Relics of the Holy Nun Martyr Philothei of Athens.

The parish then served a meal for everyone. Father Alexander Hahr, who is currently in Etna, California, to complete his theological studies at the St. Photios Orthodox Seminary, sent greetings and best wishes through Father Anders to Metropolitan Cyprian.

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That evening, the customary parish Synaxis was held, with an impressive number of young adults in attendance.

His Eminence discussed how we as Christians ought to deal with difficulties arising from our relations with our fellow human beings, whether it be in marriage, in a monastic community, in a school classroom, or in a work group. If we have resolved to live a life in Christ, that means that our fellow human being is our neighbor, for whose sake we are called to show loving self-sacrifice and great patience in trials, constantly invoking God's aid: "God helping me" [from the service of the Tonsure to the Great Schema].

Let us proceed in life understanding certain things. We should not expect, for example, that marriage will be a "bed of roses," but let us be prepared to face, in a Christian manner, various difficulties once we have entered into a marriage, so that we do not give up and want to separate at the slightest difficulty.

We have need of vigilance and prayer when living and working together with others, especially when our surroundings are so contrary to our Christian identity.

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On Monday, February 20 (Old Style), Metropolitan Cyprian had a constructive meeting with the clergy, during which Father Anders discussed the activities and developments of the last few months. Among other things, he spoke about the fruitful visit of





Father George Shahla Buhaous and the reception of new members into our Church, and also about the renovation of the baptismal chapel. His Eminence gave instructions on these matters and others relating to the mission of our Church in Sweden.

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On Tuesday, February 21 (Old Style), Metropolitan Cyprian left for Greece, accompanied by a severe cold and the gratitude of the clergy and faithful in Sweden. We thank our Lord yet again, since this pastoral visit proved to be very auspicious for our brothers and sisters in Sweden and the witness of Genuine Orthodoxy in this highly secular country.

