

# faith & religion

The Hellenic Voice, Page 9  
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10 - 17, 2011

## The Dormition of the Theotokos

By BISHOP JOHN OF AMORION

Come August 15, Orthodox Christians will be observing and celebrating the Dormition of the Theotokos, and as we do so we are reminded that in the order of holiness, first among all saints is the Virgin Mary. This is demonstrated in all Orthodox chapels and churches, wherein on the Iconostasion the first icon on the left of the Beautiful Gate is always that of the Theotokos with the Christ child, and in the highest point of the apse in the sanctuary is that of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as the Platiara.

Historically speaking, the Hellenes of the Byzantine Empire always felt and experienced a special relationship with the Theotokos. Her Greek Orthodox citizens always looked upon the Theotokos as their "Mother" and "Protector." According to the New Testament narratives, the Virgin Mary, as the Mother of God had experienced pain in her life, being that she always was "there" in the major events of Christ's life, which were mostly painful moments as opposed to being moments of glory. As a consequence, whenever we are overcome with pain, grief, sorrow, etc., the Theotokos Panagia is always there to share with us her compassion, understanding and love for us.

This being the case, we oftentimes turn to her prayers of intercession to Christ. That Orthodox Christians share a special close relationship with Panagia is indicative of the many names they have showered upon the Theotokos, as Gregoroussa, Eleousa, Megaloharti, Odegetria, Glikoflousa and so many more.

During the 1000-year Byzantine era, the presence of the Theotokos is always present and referred to as the "Supreme General," who protected especially the Queen City of Constantinople - time and time again, from the invasion of the infidels, whereupon the Ecumenical Patriarch would carry the miraculous icon Panagia Pammakaristos in solemn procession around the massive walls of Constantinople, as her citizens marched in prayer and sang hymns. The mosaic Panagia Pammakaristos icon is now to be found at the Phanar's Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George on the wall of the right aisle.

During the last century, the miraculous icon of the Annunciation on the island of Timos sank and landed the Greek people and pilgrims from the unexpected torpedo hit of the Greek ship Elle docked there by an Italian submarine on August 14, 1940. With "one voice" and "one word," the Greek people said "Oxi!" - "No!" upon being invaded by the Axis powers and sent the enemy troops out of Greece into the snow-capped mountains of Albania with a single word "Aera!"

So is that Panagia is the strongest word, along with God and Christ, which offers comfort and compassion on the lips of every Orthodox Christian who may be in pain or in need. Thus, as we observe the Dormition of the Theotokos, let us with a grateful heart recommit ourselves to Panagia, rendering her honor, respect, gratitude and love.

Amen

Bishop John of Amorion is a retired bishop of Atlanta. He lives in Tucker, Ga.

## West Coast church musicians gather for annual forum



Federation president Kathy Meck speaks at the Metropolis House where the delegates gathered for dinner on Friday evening.

At its annual forum this year, the Metropolis of San Francisco Church Music Federation followed a more interactive format instead of focusing on learning a large choral arrangement of the Divine Liturgy.

Delegates from parishes throughout the Metropolis met at the Annunciation Cathedral in San Francisco June 17-18. Topics of discussion included the establishment of a youth music director position for the Metropolis, fall regional Church Music Institutes, and the recently launched Federation website: [sanfran.churchmusicgo.org](http://sanfran.churchmusicgo.org).

Current officers were re-elected: Kathy Meck, president, Liz Levy, vice president, Daralynne Baddour, treasurer, and Athena Anastas, secretary. Following the meeting, Metropolitan Gerasimos welcomed the delegates to the Metropolis House for dinner.

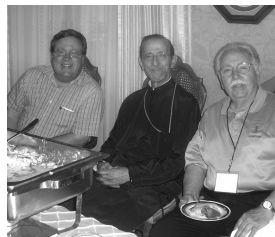
Saturday presentations and workshops included: "Orthodox Cultural Literacy" led by Father Arts Metrakos (Holy Trinity, San Francisco), and "The Role of Fine Arts in Orthodox Church Worship" presented by Dr. Theodore Bogdanos.

A special session presenting new music was led by Dr. Tiley Zes, assisted by several choir directors. Laura Kakis Serper, choir director at the Ascension Cathedral in Oakland, spoke on getting children involved in church music.

The final presentation was offered by Ragan Bohlin, director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. Using music by Bach, Rachmaninoff, Bogdanos and Zes, Mr. Bohlin brought forth a richer and more resonant sound.



Dennis Constantine, program director at KFOG radio in San Francisco and former choir president at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Portland, with Loula Anastas of Holy Cross, Belmont.



Nick Tarlson (Annunciation Cathedral, San Francisco), Metropolitan Gerasimos and Terry Kastanis (Annunciation, Sacramento).

## St. Vladimir's to honor armed forces

YONKERS, N.Y. - On Saturday, October 1, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary will honor military chaplains and service men and women at its annual open house, Orthodox Education Day. Activities for the day will center on the theme, "For God and Country."

The Rev. Dr. Philip LeMasters, dean of the School of Social Sciences and Religion at McMurry University and a trustee of St. Vladimir's, will deliver the keynote: "Orthodox Perspectives on Peace, War, and Violence."

Dr. Stephen Muse, director of the counselor training program at the Pastoral Institute Inc. in Columbus, Ga., will lead the primary workshop on support clergy and laity can offer veterans and insights military men and women can offer the church. The seminary community is soliciting

photos for display, and the names of living and deceased members of the armed forces, which will be used in prayerful intercession on Orthodox Education Day.

Photos and names may be sent to the events coordinator, Tanya Penkrat: [penkrat@svots.edu](mailto:penkrat@svots.edu) or (914) 961-8313

x351. Parishes and individuals who would like to help with donations for ethnic food booths may also contact Mrs. Penkrat. For more information, visit [svots.edu](http://svots.edu).

## GREEK FESTIVAL PREVIEW

### Assumption Church GreekFest

The Assumption Greek Orthodox Church will hold GreekFest, its annual two-day festival, on Saturday, August 20, and Sunday, August 21, at the church grounds at 111 Island Pond Road in Manchester, N.H.

The festival will be held from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. on Saturday, and from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is free and parking is available. The festivities will take place under a big tent.

This year's festival is also a celebration of the church's 75th anniversary.

"As part of this celebration we will feature special events and items to mark this very important milestone," said Arthur D. Bakolas, parish council president. "We are proud to have been part of the Manchester community for these past 75 years and look forward to another 75."

"Our annual festival has become a Manchester attraction drawing thousands of visitors through New England," added Fr. Anthanasios Nenes, parish priest.

Guests will be able to sample a wide variety of Greek food and pastries. DJ Meletti will provide Greek music all day Saturday and on Sunday. A variety of vendors will be selling their wares. Other highlights of the festival include a multi-prize raffle, a



WHEN:

August 20-21

WHERE:

Assumption Church  
111 Island Pond Road  
Manchester, NH 03109

penny sale, children's activities and tours of the church.

For more information, call the church office at (603) 623-2045. You can also visit the church's website at [www.AssumptionNH.org](http://www.AssumptionNH.org) or look for the church on Facebook.

See the Assumption Church GreekFest ad on page 8. This article is included as part of The Hellenic Voice's Greek Festival Ad Package. Call (781) 402-0027 ext. 405 for details.

## LIVES OF THE SAINTS

### Repose of the Blessed Virgin Mary August 15

Until such time as the Ecumenical Synod dictates otherwise, August 15 of each year remains on the Greek Orthodox calendar as a day of solemnity, commemorating the passing from this earth of the Virgin Mary, a day now called "The Repose of the Theotokos," a day marking a period of fasting and penance. Also called "The Dormition," the falling asleep of the blessed Mother of God is one of four days of the year which are chosen to honor the Virgin Mary, the other days being September 8 in observance of the nativity of the holy Mother, followed by November 21, the day on which is celebrated the Presentation of Mary at the Temple by her parents, Joachim and Anna. The most hallowed of days in honor of the Virgin Mary falls on March 25, the day on which the course of world history was altered with the appearance before Mary of the Archangel Gabriel with the historic announcement that she would become the Mother of God.

The sensitive nature of an observance so sacred it bears discussion for varying points of view only under the most solemn of occasions, such as that of an Ecumenical Synod, the day known as the Dormition means to the Orthodox through centuries of an unwritten tradition that the Virgin Mary was resurrected and ascended bodily to Heaven. This concept, not officially recognized by the Church as that which actually occurred, stems from the traditional accounts dating back to biblical times.

Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land for centuries have sought out the graveside of the Virgin Mary and to this day, this ennobling experience is felt by the thousands fortunate enough to make the journey of their life to the land where Jesus walked. The tomb, located at the base of the Garden of Gethsemane, is actually 100 feet below the surface of the earth and is reached by a descent of stairwell whose every step is sacred. At about the 50-foot level, one pauses at the tomb of Joachim and Anna, the parents of Mary, at the right of which is the tomb of the protector of the Mother of God, St. Joseph. At the base of the marble staircase is the tomb of Mary, but her remains are not encased there. The tomb is empty but still venerated, not out of sentiment but out of belief in what tradi-

tion says about her resurrection. When the Mother of God was about to join her son in Heaven, she summoned the apostles to her bedside, all of whom except St. Thomas were able to be with her in her final hours. St. Thomas did not arrive until after the burial service and his request to have a final look resulted in the discovery of the empty vault, which led to the belief that an angel of the Lord appeared to advise the bewildered St. Thomas and his friends that holy Mary had been taken to Heaven in the manner of the Savior.

Further observations on the manner of the death of the Mother of God result in dogmatics, but her sweet life, particularly those 33 years devoted to the Man of Nazareth whom she mothered so tenderly, deserved a consummation a cut above that accorded the average mother, however saintly and selfless she might be. To some it is inconceivable that Mary's final days would end in a transfer to the gates of heaven in the spiritual life promised by the Savior to all who believed in Him. What transpired after the birth of Christ in the stable, between Mother and Child, through all the years of infancy, childhood and adolescence is known but to God and the Virgin Mary.

It is not known what detained St. Thomas in an answer to the summons to the deathbed of the Virgin Mary, but there is no doubt he suffered considerable anguish at having arrived too late. He must have made every effort to join his fellow apostles at the bedside of the Mother of God. It was as unusual then as it is now to reopen a casket once it has been supposedly closed forever, but the circumstances themselves were unusual because it was anything but a commonplace death. There is only one Son of God and it was his Mother who had passed on and therefore under the circumstances, the wish of a saint to lay eyes once more upon the Mother of God could not very well be denied.

Man had nothing to do with the selection of Mary. It was God's choice to begin with and God's will that she ascend into heaven; and man can only speculate thereafter.