

St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology

An Academic community of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
The Most Rev. Metropolitan SABA, Primate

December 20, 2024

Dear Fr. Mark,

Greetings in this season of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord. Under a separate cover, you will receive a copy of our first official publication under the name of St. Athanasius College Press – The Inner Heaven of Man, A Companion to St. Nikolai Velimirović's Prologue of Ohrid.

Please allow me to review the many developments of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology over the past five years. Back in 2019, I submitted an idea to Fr. Adam Roberts (then Subdeacon Adam) of bringing our old catalog of 16 correspondence courses online in a distance learning format. The purpose was to use this material in the Department of Missions and Evangelism under the Lord's directive in the Great Commission: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

As we began the task, Fr. Adam, now serving as President of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, began making calls to priests in order to recruit them as graders for each course. What we discovered in this process was a much greater need – to help the parents of homeschoolers to tutor their children. Many of these priests both developed programs and agreed to tutor these children. This completely new idea began to develop, and it was put online. The next year, the whole world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the Lord would have it, our online secondary education program exploded! Today we have a full K-12 school, St. Athanasius Academy www.saaot.edu with scholarships to the children of priests of all canonical Orthodox jurisdictions funded by a benevolent donor.

At the same time, other ideas began to emerge out the COVID crisis. We began developing a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program for priests with Bp JOHN (Abdalah) and Fr. David Alexander. This Center for Orthodox Spiritual Care continues to be offered every semester for actual CPE credit and certification.

We began working with Dn. Nicholas Kotar who had a dream of developing an Orthodox Christian Writer's Workshop for fiction writers. He recruited Paul Kingsnorth, Jonathan Pageau, Katherine Bolger Hyde, Nicole Roccas, and Kamira Kawash as instructors. St. Basil Writer's Workshop was born and The Wood Between the Worlds Press has already launched its presence on Substack.

When we came back around to the idea of developing these correspondence courses, the idea of developing an undergraduate Orthodox Christian College began to emerge and we realized that these courses fit nicely into the first two years of study.

At the core of all this work is our other main division of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology – St. Athanasius College. The anchor department of the college is Biblical Studies, led by Jordan Henderson, PhD. We are well into the process of gaining accreditation through the

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Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. We are hopeful that full accreditation can be gained by the end of 2025.

In addition, we have embarked on the ambitious project to translate the New Testament by a team of Orthodox Christian Theologians and translators. You may recall that although the Orthodox Study Bible Old Testament (Septuagint) has already been translated, we used the New King James Version as our text for the New Testament. Should we achieve this goal, the Orthodox Study Bible Project would be complete.

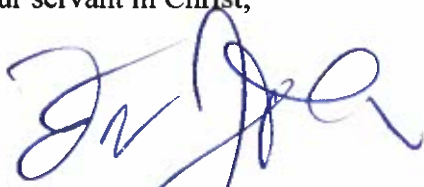
Personally, I consider the accreditation of St. Athanasius College undergraduate program with the prospect of offering a Bachelor of Arts in Theology degree, along with the translation of the New Testament, a legacy project to fulfill the dreams of V. Rev. Jack Sparks, V. Rev. Richard Ballew, V. Rev. Jon Braun, V. Rev. Peter Gillquist, and V. Rev. Gordon Walker, and many others. Such an undertaking would keep their memories and legacies alive as visionaries of the evangelization of North America with the Orthodox Christian Faith and Life.

In order to accomplish these ambitious dreams and goals related to St. Athanasius College, we need to raise at least \$150,000 to see us through to the end of May 2025. Over \$50,000 has already been promised by SAAOT Board members, and we are hoping to raise an additional \$100,000 in the coming weeks and months.

Would you consider helping us to meet this goal? If you have already planned your end-of-the-year charitable donations, a gift after the first of the year would still be greatly appreciated. If you are unable to give, perhaps you know of someone who would also be interested in supporting our vision of an accredited Christian Orthodox undergraduate college in the United States. Please share this letter with them. Even your parish might consider a donation.

Asking for your prayers, I remain

Your servant in Christ,



V. Rev. John D. Finley

Donations may be made to:
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Memo: St. Athanasius College