



# Antiochian Women

Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

Most Reverend  
Metropolitan PHILIP  
*Founder*  
358 Mountain Road  
Englewood, New Jersey 07631

Right Reverend  
Bishop JOSEPH  
*Bishop of Los Angeles and the West*  
454 South Lorraine Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90020

## Spring Diocesan Newsletter

### Commemoration of Mother Mary of Egypt (April 5)

Through thee, the divine likeness was securely preserved, O mother Mary; for thou didst carry the cross and follow Christ. By example and precept thou didst teach us to ignore the body, because it is perishable, and to attend to the concerns of the undying soul. Therefore, doth thy soul rejoice with the angels.

(Apolytikion in Tone 8)

*Please copy and distribute, email, or otherwise make this newsletter available to the women in your parish.*

A Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others

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His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

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**Self-Ruled**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Diocese of Los Angeles and the West**  
**The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West**  
His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

**Caring for the Disabled**

“Why does God allow children to suffer?”

I do not know anyone who has not asked such a question. In fact, some people refuse to believe in God because of the pain and suffering they have seen innocent children bear. They would rather deny that God exists than to see the Creator of the Universe as one who stands back and permits the helpless to undergo pain and anguish.

We, as Christians who know the Truth of God, understand that suffering is not what He intended for us. Yet, each day, millions of people choose to suffer. They refuse to repent of their evils, and they bring more suffering into the world. They start wars, they murder and steal and rape, they rejoice at the downfall of others and they disregard those they could help.

Yet, we do not hate humanity for worsening its own situation, do we? No, because we all sense that mankind is really the one with the problem, and our frustration comes from our own laziness. We refuse to heal the world. We want God, or at least someone else, to do the hard work for us.

So, why does God allow children to suffer? Why does He not save them from lives of pain and inconvenience? If we look at this life as the only life we have, it seems cruel. But, we know that this life is but the beginning of an eternal journey, and that the trials and struggles of this life are but a brief moment. God will give those who suffer His justice and blessings in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Even in this life, handicapped children still find reasons to smile. The greatest consolation they have is not in wholeness, but rather in our love for them. Disabled children rely more heavily on us, and so they are far more appreciative of what we give them. They know they cannot do what other children do, but they receive their joy from how much we are willing to aid them in their accomplishments.

The question then becomes: who suffers more, the handicapped, or the parents and relatives who know they are helpless to bring wholeness to children? The real suffering is in our own guilt, our acknowledgement that mankind's fall in the Garden led to such suffering.

As Orthodox Christians, we know the joy of ministering to others. This is a cornerstone of our Faith: almsgiving and acts of mercy as seen in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We must all be good neighbors to those overtaken by the brokenness of the world.

The Antiochian Women have a special ministry to those in need within our parishes, and so it is no surprise that our beloved Metropolitan Philip speaks to you as a prophet, calling the Antiochian Women to take up the cause of disabled children.

Yet, by taking up this act of mercy, you will not only help countless disabled and needy children, you will also heal yourselves by participating in God's mercy through your actions. You will alleviate some of your own suffering by bringing hope and joy. Yes, you will discover the healing and spiritual happiness in sharing your material blessings with those truly in need.

In the end, you will discover that those children we call 'disabled' have the ability to bless us. After all, they provide us with the opportunity to do good works.

**REMEMBER ME, O LORD, WHEN THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM!**

**"O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, meddling, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother; for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen."**

**The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian**



# Children with Special Needs

"Let the **little children** come to me,  
and **do not forbid them**;  
for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 19:14



Help us reach our goal of **\$150,000**

**Project**  
**2008-2009**

Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy,  
Down Syndrome, Autism,  
Multiple Sclerosis, Asperger's Syndrome  
and more . . . . .

Antiochian Women | a sisterhood serving Christ through serving others

**SEND PROJECT MONEY TO:**

**Mirna Shomali, 420 West Gladstone St. Unit #49, Glendora, CA 91740**

**Please contact Mirna with any project questions**

**phone 626-462-9959**

**e-mail mirna\_4m3@yahoo.com**

## A message from Fr. David Hovik, Spiritual Advisor

Recently, I was reading an interview in The Orthodox Word (No. 261) with Elder Joel of Sihastria Monastery in Romania. The Elder was asked: "**What was your greatest spiritual joy in the years of your youth**" [his early 20's in the monastery]? His response is of great significance: "**... that I was a disciple and cell-attendant to my father and abbot Ionichie** [from the day he arrived in 1932 through 1945]. **This was the greatest joy of my life - that I had an example in the monastic life. He taught me many good things, and I saw and heard a lot from him.**" Most of us will never be called to this monastic life but we all can benefit greatly by availing ourselves of these living links with true Holiness.

The following is the example set by this holy abbot and witnessed, first-hand, by Elder Joel: He lived in a very simple cell and he had no money, possessions or food in the cell [monastic living space]. He continually read the Psalter, he never missed church and he had great love towards all. For twenty years he served the Liturgy daily because he was the only priest at the monastery. During the year he ate one meal daily [fasting food] at 3:00 pm and during the four fasting periods he would only eat on Saturday and Sunday. He would do one hundred prostrations per night, always kept quiet and unceasingly said the prayer for the heart [the Jesus Prayer].

In addition to this disciplined life, the abbot also passed on important words of instruction. "**More than anything he counseled us to maintain these three things; fear of God, vigilance of mind** (keeping it pure of evil thoughts and imaginings), **and not to forget the Jesus Prayer. Then, he urged every one of us to do our prayer rule and prostrations...**" However, in the midst of his strictness with himself, note how compassionate he was with Elder Joel who says: "**And when I was tired and upset with temptations, the elder would comfort me with these words: 'Beloved, have patience, be at peace, and don't worry about every little thing!... you are hungry, you are thirsty, you are tired! Have hope. The Mother of God strengthens us.' When I would err in something, he would say to me in a meek voice, 'Beloved, allow me to reproach you a little.'**"

This is but a sample of his godly life. While visiting England with Presv. Debbie, to conduct a former parishioner's wedding, I was blessed to be able to visit the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, in Essex. Here, I was able to tap into a living link with the Holy Tradition I have noted above. Meg Robinson, a parishioner of ours, is experiencing the same thing. As you read this article, she is residing in the monastery outside of Damascus. What I found to be most encouraging about the monastery in Essex was the diversity amongst the monks and nuns. Fifteen different languages are spoken at this monastery which houses 29 nuns and 13 monks in the two separate communities. I met monastics from France, Greece, England, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Egypt and joined in a two hour service where the *Jesus Prayer* was prayed in six different languages.

As we enter this holy and intense final period of Lent my hope is that the desire to tap into this *living link*, of the best of Holy Orthodoxy, is kindled within you. Not an unrealistic attempt to scale unassailable heights but, nonetheless, a vision of what is possible if we patiently pursue the Patristic path of Orthodoxy laid out for us by the Fathers. You may say, "*Fr. David, hardly anybody lives like this.*"

St. John Chrysostom addresses this very issue when he writes: *"Even if very few stay true to Orthodoxy and Godliness, they [these few] are they Church of Christ."* With all of my heart I want to exhort each of you to participate fully in the life of your parish during this Lenten/Paschal season. In addition to your regular Saturday and Sunday services make every effort to participate fully in ALL of the Holy Week services. It is through entering into the life of the Church, via these services, that our hearts begin to open up and we do, indeed, begin to tap into the *living link* I have noted above. May God strengthen each of us in our efforts to become part of this living Tradition.

In Christ's love,  
Fr. David

***"Thy love draws me to Thee, O Savior, O praise of my life. Thy grace makes it sweet for me to follow Thee with my mind."***  
**-- St. Ephraim the Syrian**

**From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain" by Elder Ephraim (1927- )**  
(from pages 306-307)

**7.** Cry out the name of God; He is ready to help everyone who asks. Do not forget the prayer; man's entire being is sanctified by the prayer. It is the only thing which those who do not struggle to the point of shedding blood are unable to do.

What is more beautiful than prayer! Whoever prays is enlightened and comes to know the will of God. And how does he know it? When he prays well, of course. And when does he pray well? When he sends his prayers to God with all the right ingredients. And what are the ingredients that make prayer savory? Humility, tears, self-reproach, simplicity, and especially obedience with love. Prayer sheds light and this light shows the right path which God wills.

The prayer should be said without flagging; by praying thus you will remain invulnerable on all sides. When you find yourselves in a state of passionate thoughts, resume the prayer eagerly and assiduously, and immediately you will find relief. Hold on to the Jesus prayer steadfastly.

**8.** Say the prayer with pain and mourning of soul, and then you will feel different. Pay attention only to yourself! Then you will see yourself and you will feel pain, and that pain will bring you the mercy of God. Do not pay attention to heartbeats when you say the prayer. Just keep your mind from wandering away from the prayer—this is the center and the aim of prayer.

Pray continuously with the Jesus prayer; it will set everything right. Whoever prays is enlightened, whereas whoever neglects prayer—like me—is darkened. Prayer is heavenly light, and whoever has the prayer within him or on his lips has the light of prayer welling up within his heart, and this enlightens him what to think and how to guard himself against the snares of the devil.

## A message from our President: *Lucy Hanna*

Dear Sisters in Christ,

I greet you in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and welcome those of you who are with us here at the Southern California Spring Retreat. To those of you who were unable to attend, I send you my love and best wishes.

I am humbled and honored to have been your president for almost two years now. This coming May, at the Parish Life Conference, hosted by St. Stephen Church of Campbell, California, we will be electing new officers. Following the elections, the new president will be appointing coordinators for the various committees. I encourage all of you to examine your hearts and consider running for an office or accepting a coordinator position. You have all received a letter and nomination form from our Immediate Past President, Samia Habib. Please take it seriously and offer back to God some of the talents He has given you.

The theme of this year's conference is "*Be mindful O Lord, of those who bear fruit and do good works in Thy holy Churches, and who remember the poor.*" The Antiochian Women Organization was founded with this concept in mind, and by doing good works and remembering the poor, we serve God Himself through serving others.

Our annual project affords us an opportunity to do just that. This year's project is "*Children with Special Needs*". Most of us have been touched in our lives by someone with special needs. Whether it is within our own families, our Church, in the community we live in or in the world at large, God is calling us to do whatever we can to help them. This year our Metropolitan has challenged us to raise \$150,000 for this project and asked that the proceeds benefit a very worthy organization in Lebanon called "Al-Kafaàt". The word "Al-Kafaàt" literally means "Abilities". This is what this organization does - it provides "abilities" to people with "disabilities".

If there was no Al-Kafaàt, people with disabilities in Lebanon would have nowhere else to go. More often than not, children born with disabilities end up in the streets because they are an embarrassment to their families. There are no public institutions that care for people with disabilities in Lebanon. What makes Al-Kafaàt important is the fact that it is the ONLY organization in Lebanon that takes the most severe cases of disabilities (such as multiple-disabilities, chronic disabilities, and severe autism), and also the ONLY organization there that accepts children, adults, and elderly with disabilities – thus providing care from the cradle to the grave.

I appeal to every Antiochian Women chapter in our Diocese to hold a fund raising event for this worthwhile project. The deadline for the Project Money to the Diocesan Project coordinator is April 30, 2008. Please send your checks to our coordinator:

**Mirna Shomali, 420 West Gladstone St. Unit #49, Glendora, CA 91740.**

Please know that I am always available to support you and answer any questions you may have. Feel free to contact me by phone or email any time.

Your sister in Christ,

*Lucy Hanna*, President

Home: (951) 736-9809 Cell:(951) 415-7667

Email: [lucy.hanna@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lucy.hanna@sbcglobal.net)

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454 South Lorraine Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90020



### Nomination Form: 2009-2011

Name of Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Office nominated for: President:  Vice President:   
Recording/Correspondence Secretary:  Treasurer:  Public Relations:

I am interested in an appointment to a Coordinator Position:  
Humanitarian  Membership  Religious  Spring Retreat/Scholarship

Qualifications for Office: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Antiochian Women offices held: Local: \_\_\_\_\_  
Diocesan: \_\_\_\_\_ NAB: \_\_\_\_\_

Offices held in other organizations – SOYO, Fellowship of St. John, etc.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Approval of Parish Priest (REQUIRED):

Home Parish: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Priest: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parish Priest: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to Samia Habib by May 1, 2009: 852 Maple St., Burbank, CA 91505**

Nomination Committee: Samia Habib - Chairperson, Isabel Elac, Georgette Malouf  
Samia:818.919.3870 Isabel:818.956.3756 Georgette:818.391.6217

**Myrrhbearers**  
**Antiochian Women of St. Stephen Orthodox Church**  
**Campbell, CA 95008**

Dear Sisters in Christ--

Another Lent has come and another Paschal celebration approaches! We celebrated a very special Pascha last year with His Grace, Bishop Joseph in attendance, and this year we are looking forward both to Pascha and to hosting the 2009 Parish Life Conference in the month to follow. This feels like an enormous undertaking for a parish of our size, but we trust that by the prayer and effort we put into the preparation for both celebrations we will bless those who attend and be blessed through the process and in our fellowship with many of you.

Our Myrrhbearers group continues to meet monthly for a very meaningful time of prayer, Bible study and business/planning. Over the past couple of years the leadership of our group has changed as younger women have begun to take over responsibility from the women who served so faithfully for so many years, but we still rely very much on their support and wisdom and strive to follow their example as we serve. Amy Ashworth, our president in 2008, just gave birth to her third son (!) and so even newer officers were elected in January of this year. We pray that by God's grace we, and all of our members, will be enabled to serve with as much humility and lead by truly Christian example.

We also pray that both you and we would have a truly blessed season of Great Lent, that our efforts in prayer and fasting would be fruitful and that each of us would come with great joy to the Resurrection of our Lord!

Sincerely,

Jodi Hailey  
President, St. Stephen Antiochian Women



*"Faith and hope are not merely casual or theoretical matters. Faith requires a steadfast soul, while hope needs a firm will and an honest heart." -- St. Theognostos*

## **SAINT BARNABAS PARISH WOMEN'S GROUP**

*Fellowship of St. Elizabeth the New Martyr*

Costa Mesa, CA

We hold one Fundraiser a year: Our Annual Oktoberfest/Silent Auction and Bake Sale. All of our women get involved with the cooking, decorating and serving. We have been very fortunate to have Bruce Heying (who we've dubbed an "honorary member of the women's group") to take on the BBQ duties each year. His wife, Lynn Marie, has been the organizer of our very successful silent auction - contacting local businesses and (most importantly) sending out follow-up e-mails, phone calls, and thank-you letters.

From this, we are able to make our annual dues payment, donate to the annual Antiochian Women Charity Project, and make other community and parish donations; such as purchasing a new coffee maker for our soup kitchen ministry and sponsoring our annual "Meet-and-Greet New Catechumens BBQ".

We've also been able to bring in guest speakers (we've enjoyed hearing from Fr. Michael Lewis, Mother Melania, and Turbo Qualls - to name a few). Besides having guest speakers, some of our monthly fellowship gatherings have included a "Recycle Night/ Treasure Swap"; "Scrapbooking/Homemade Greeting Card" Workshop; "Stocking Stuffer Project" for the Homeless; Holiday Cookie Exchange; and a Book Swap & Potluck Night.

Michele Marr, a woman in our parish, who is also a columnist for THE HUNTINGTON BEACH INDEPENDENT, had this article published last March:

[www.hbindependent.com/articles/2008/07/03/blogs\\_and\\_columns/soulfood/hbi-soul070308.txt](http://www.hbindependent.com/articles/2008/07/03/blogs_and_columns/soulfood/hbi-soul070308.txt)



### **What is “Caring Bridge”**

**By: Dr. Karen Silbert Haddy**

*Many of you may recall, recently Fr. David's grandson was very ill and hospitalized. The family used “Caring Bridge” to communicate the progress and full recovery of little Thomas.*  
~Melinda

Our close friends on Long Island have a 24-year-old son named Marshall, who started coughing. Since he'd never had any health problems like that before, no one thought much of it until he became short of breath. To everyone's complete shock, it turned out that Marshall was in serious heart failure, and within a week he was at Columbia University's cardiac ICU, being considered for a heart transplant. We may never know what caused his heart to fail—possibly a virus—but there appears to be very little chance that it will recover on its own, and there is no telling how long it may take for him to get a new heart.

Naturally all Marshall's extended family and friends have been tremendously anxious and eager for news, but did not want to bombard his parents and sister with too many phone calls or emails. Fortunately, Marshall's older sister Arden learned about a web site called Caring Bridge, [www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org). This is a free, non-profit web site that is very easy to use, even for people with little computer experience.

The Caring Bridge website was started back in 1997 by a woman named Sona Mehring whose close friend was having a life-threatening pregnancy. Since then, Caring Bridge has been used by over 150,000 families to keep in touch through periods of critical illness, treatment, and recovery. It's amazing and saddening to realize how many families go through cancer treatment, traumatic injuries, premature births, or waiting for organ transplant, to give just a few examples.

Caring Bridge has provided a wonderful way for all the friends and family to hear about Marshall's progress and send messages back without disturbing anyone. The website even has a notification feature that sends me an email to let me know whenever a new journal entry has been posted by Marshall's dad or sister. If you know anyone in a situation where this kind of communication would be helpful, please refer them to the Caring Bridge website. And do keep Marshall and his family in your prayers.

Dr. Karen Sibert Haddy  
St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral  
Los Angeles



## **A Christian Ending to a Life**

**By: Marge Bentz, St. Luke's, Garden Grove**

My husband, Bill, was an invalid for fourteen years before God welcomed him home. Those years hold some of my happiest memories from our forty-two year marriage. Odd, isn't it, that it took a serious illness to produce the dearest memories of our life together?

Bill was an engineer. He had the engineers' personality: quiet, unassuming, not much for small talk, kind of shy. During our marriage we were blessed with five children, various cats and owned some rental property. Bill traveled often during his employment so when he took an early retirement he thoroughly enjoyed our big back yard, planting tropical plants, making the deck at the back of our house wider and longer, soaking up our peaceful neighborhood and deciding what he want to accomplish that day.

The illness came on him suddenly and within a few months showed us that this was not going to be an easy fight. I think he realized that fairly soon but kept it from me. I hoped he would fight it and get better. Through the years of caring for Bill at home, many prayers were said and requests made for God to heal him from this illness. Physical healing was not God's plan.

An odd thing happened early on in his illness. When we were alone, we began to reminisce about

how we met and decided to marry. It was a new topic for both of us. We had led such busy lives. Now we had time to concentrate on each other. Our discussions dove deeper into our own memories and we began to express our feelings more openly every time. We shared what we liked about one another, how we had both grown closer the longer we were married, what we wished had been different. As Bill got worse our emotions were no longer held back. “I love you”, a common phrase for us to use, was broadened to “Oh, I have always loved the way you hug me tight like that with your arms right where they are now”, or “I will always remember the way you hum to that music that’s playing on KUSC now” or, “I always knew you would be a good wife for me because of the way you noticed things about me right from the first like how I liked my meat cooked and what I drank with meals. You always had things I liked in your frig when I came over.” We laughed about our first kiss – it was “off center” but both of us were just happy that it had happened!

With sixteen months left of our life together, Bill became blind and had very limited movement. One day I wanted a hug from him and had to put his arms, one by one, around me. It was a good, good hug, but I told him that I wished I hadn’t gained so much weight and that we weren’t so old. He said, “Honey, when I’m with you I see the beautiful girl I married. When I hold you, I feel the beautiful girl I married.”

I never expected to hear such words spoken aloud by Bill. That was not his usual style. Amazed, I could only respond that he was my only love, my “Prince Charming”.

“I don’t want to be a “Prince Charming” he said. “I just want to be your husband.”

Soon we began to tell each other what we would miss if one of us were gone. We spoke of things we would have changed if we could. We stopped the world by cherishing each minute we were together. Each word, when we were alone, carried special meaning for us, each touch, each sigh, and each breath. The last days of his life Bill’s eyes searched for me, my arms yearned to keep him cradled and hold him close. Never had the bond seemed so strong as in those last days when we were alone in the hospital room.

“I will always love you, Sweetheart,” I’d whisper.

He’d give a little sigh, unable to speak. I’d kiss him. With all the strength he could muster, he’d squeeze his eyes shut and turn his head a bit toward me for another. The shy engineer was gone and the dear, sweet, loving man he had hidden away for so long emerged in full bloom during his last years. We were both sorry that it took a terrible illness to chip away at our reserve, but happy that we had the time to come to complete openness with each other. We opened our hearts to each other without fear of teasing, rejection or anything negative. Before he left we had shared all our memories and joys. We had prayed together many times. We knew with surety that we would be together again. Truly he was granted a Christian ending to this life filled with hope in the resurrection of our Lord.



*"He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver..." Malachi 3:3*

This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study.

That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver.

As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot; then she thought again about the verse that says:

"He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined.

The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"

He smiled at her and answered,

"Oh, that's easy -- when I see my image in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.



## **Facts and Fiction about Losing Weight**

**By: Dr. Karen Silbert Haddy**

Spring is the perfect time to think about losing weight, as we look forward to the season of swimsuits and sundresses. It's easy to spend a lot of money on books about different diets, special foods, and supplements "guaranteed" to help you shed pounds. But there is no magic answer to the problem of how to lose weight.

The first step for anyone is to understand how overweight she is. The measurement that clinicians use is called the Body Mass Index, or BMI, which is calculated from weight and height. For example, a woman who is 5 ft. 3 inches tall and weighs 125 pounds has a healthy BMI of 22. If she weighs 140 to 170 pounds, she would have a BMI of 25-30 and would be classified as overweight. Between 170 and 225 pounds, her BMI would be 30-40 and she would be considered obese. Above 225 pounds, with a BMI greater than 40, she would be termed morbidly obese. A BMI above 40 puts her at risk for serious illness including high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, sleep apnea, and heart disease.

If you, like many women, would like to lose 10-20 pounds, there is one simple way to do this: eat fewer calories than you use up. Disregard anything that you read which tries to prove that one kind of food is especially better or worse. A recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compared diets with different proportions of fat, protein, and carbohydrates. Each diet contained about 750 calories less than the study subjects usually ate each day. In the first 6 months, they lost an average of 13 pounds or 6 kilograms regardless of which diet they followed.

What matters more than any other single factor in weight loss is the size of the portion you eat. If you don't want to change the kind of foods that you and your family like to eat, here is the simplest formula: put half of what you would ordinarily eat on your plate and don't have seconds. You don't have to eliminate all desserts; just limit yourself to two bites. Other tips that work well:

- Lean proteins—egg whites, chicken or turkey breast, canned tuna packed in water—are slow to digest and keep you from feeling hungry for a longer time. (Obviously, these are foods to eat after Pascha!)
- Whole grain breads and crackers are also slow to digest and more nutritious than white bread.
- A cup of hot tea (without milk or sugar) can give you a boost of energy between meals without adding any calories.
- Keep a small bag of plain almonds in your purse when you're out of the house—eating a few at a time will help you stay away from vending machine snacks.
- A small piece of dark chocolate (not milk chocolate!) at the end of lunch or dinner gives you the sense of having dessert and contains healthy antioxidants.

Exercise is a wonderful way to burn off some calories, and has many benefits for cardiovascular health, bone density, and cancer prevention. However, it is not going to help you much if you don't reduce your calorie intake. Walking a brisk mile on a treadmill only burns about 100 calories and a solid half-hour on an elliptical cross-trainer burns about 300. You can easily undo that with one candy bar. Changing eating habits is the only way to lose significant weight.

Unfortunately, for a woman whose BMI is greater than 40, or who weighs 100 pounds more than her ideal weight, it is going to be very hard to achieve permanent weight loss by diet and exercise alone. Weight loss surgery may be an alternative to consider, especially if she already has health problems such as high blood pressure, arthritis, or diabetes. Two basic types of weight loss or “bariatric” surgery are most commonly performed in the U.S.: gastric bypass and gastric banding. Both can be done via laparoscopy, which means that small incisions are used and recovery is relatively quick.

Gastric bypass surgery involves two steps: reducing the size of the stomach, and bypassing part of the small intestine. The patient cannot eat much at a time because the stomach is smaller, and

less of what is eaten is absorbed by the small intestine. Weight loss is steady; most patients lose up to two-thirds of their excess weight within two years. More than 80% of patients with Type II diabetes eventually are able to stop taking medication, and improvement in blood sugar occurs within days of surgery. High blood pressure and high cholesterol improve quickly too. It is important to remember that the procedure is permanent. Serious complications can occur but they are rare, and occur less often in large hospitals where the surgeons and anesthesiologists have extensive experience with the procedure.

Gastric banding is a simpler operation, which involves placing a plastic band around the stomach to reduce stomach size. This procedure appeals to many people because it is completely reversible. However, weight loss is not as impressive because there is no change in the small intestine's ability to absorb food. The gastric band is a foreign object in the body: it can become infected, cause bleeding, and may become dislodged from its optimal position. However, these complications are infrequent, and many people are very pleased with the results of their gastric banding.

For anyone who is considering weight loss surgery, it's important to take the following steps:

- See a nutritional counselor, because permanent healthy changes in your diet must happen for any surgery to be successful.
- See a psychological counselor to make sure that you are prepared for the surgery and understand the reasons that may have led you to overeat in the past.
- Have a complete physical examination, which may include cardiac stress testing.
- Check on the hospital and the surgeon to make sure that they do a large number of successful weight loss surgeries.

The blessed season of Lent is the ideal time to examine our own actions and make the resolutions that can bring real improvement in spiritual and physical health. If you would like more information about weight loss, there are many excellent web sites on line including those from the Mayo Clinic, WebMD, and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. If you have ideas for future medical topics that you would like to read about in our newsletter, please send them to me or to Melinda Bentz.

Yours in Christ,

Dr. Karen Sibert Haddy  
ksiberthaddy@hotmail.com  
St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral  
Los Angeles



*Thank you to everyone who submitted articles for this Spring newsletter. I pray this publication brings encouragement to you and the ladies of your Parishes as we complete the fast and continue in untiring service to our Lord.*

*~ Melinda Bentz, Public Relations Director*