

## Who Are the Antiochian Women?

by Dianne O'Regan

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*Antiochian. adj., of or pertaining to the city, or Christian church, of Antioch; Women, (pl. of woman), an adult female human being.*

AS THE ORTHODOX FAITHFUL AROUND THE world await the Resurrection of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, the Antiochian Orthodox Church of North America also celebrates Women's Month in March, as designated by His Eminence Metropolitan Philip. We should all remember the many events in Christ's blessed life where women played a major role. From the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel to our "second Eve," our Most Holy, Immaculate, and Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, to our Lord's visit to the home of Martha and Mary, to those who stayed at the foot of the cross, women have always served our Lord.

Is it any different 2,000 years later, that women should serve Christ and His Church? Of course not! His Eminence Metropolitan Philip realized that throughout the Church's history women were front and center. With this in mind, in 1973 he founded the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America. Since that time, the Antiochian Women have become a major "force."

So, who are the "Antiochian Women?" Quite simply, they are each and every woman — from 19 to 99 — who is a member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada. They are wives, mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. They are daughters, sisters, aunts, and cousins. They are the women who sit in front of you, next to you, and behind you in church. They are members of the "Women's Club," "Ladies' Society," or "Myrrhbearing Women." An Antiochian Woman is YOU!

Unfortunately, on more than one occasion, we have heard that the Antiochian Women are the "old ladies who work in the kitchen." However, our seniors' service to Christ and His Church is NOT confined to the kitchen. To say so is a disservice to the hard work that they have done in building the Church to new heights. Antiochian Women are not just grandmothers or great-grandmothers — they are college students, young women in their 20's, 30's and 40's, middle-aged women, and yes, senior citizens. If you look around your church, you will see the Antiochian Women in a variety of services — teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, or serving on the Parish Council, to name just a few. As we study the writings of the Church Fathers to learn more about our faith, we should also study the women who have gone before us so that we may become better workers in Christ's Church.

Now that you know who the Antiochian Women are, you may ask, "What exactly do the Antiochian Women DO?" To put it simply (and to use our motto), we are "a Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others." The Antiochian Women have committed themselves to serving Christ and His Holy Church. By giving a few minutes each day, week, month or year, the Antiochian Women serve those who are in need. The work and dedication of these women — across the United States and Canada — has been mind-boggling.

In the past thirty-plus years, the Antiochian Women have raised about \$2 million towards everything from the Antiochian Village (the Camp and the Heritage and Learning Center), to Balamand University, to Pastoral Education. The Antiochian Women's "annual projects" are legendary. In 1998, His Eminence challenged the women to raise \$1 million towards the Orthodox Orphanage Endowment Fund. In 2004, the women not only met their goal, but EXCEEDED it! Today, many Orthodox orphanages around the world receive annual contributions from this endowment fund.

The women were humbled by the statement of one of our clergy that the “Orphanage Endowment Fund will be the Antiochian Women’s legacy.”

After that achievement, Metropolitan Philip challenged the women to raise \$500,000 in five years towards the Retired Clergy Fund. As our priests have cared for us, we now seek to care for them in their retirement. To date, the Antiochian Women have raised over one-half of this challenge, in only a two-year period!

In addition to the Annual Project, the Antiochian Women also send monetary gifts each Christmas to married seminarians. The Antiochian Women award scholarships each year to “non-traditional” female college students who wish to continue their education to better their lives. The Antiochian Women have also established retreats, lectures, the “Read the Bible in a Year” program, studies on the lives of women saints, and other religious programs in order to foster spirituality among all the faithful. The Antiochian Women put forth humanitarian works, from visits to nursing homes and hospitals to educating women on various health issues that may affect them.

If your church does not have an Antiochian Women’s chapter, or if it is “inactive,” please speak to your priest for his advice and guidance. Perhaps schedule an event that is FUN and place an announcement in the church bulletin or get the church roster and send invitations (or better yet, make phone calls). As “potluck” meal after church for all the women is especially effective. Membership booklets for forming — or re-starting — a chapter are available via the North American Board’s Membership Coordinator, Kh. Joanne Bitar, at [jnbitar@aol.com](mailto:jnbitar@aol.com). Once the women in your church see the great things they can accomplish, there’s no telling what heights they will achieve.

During “Women’s Month” in March, look for the women in your church who will be serving as ushers, giving a sermonette, or reading the Epistle. After church, take a moment to go up to an Antiochian Woman that you may know, introduce yourself, invite her to join you for a cup of coffee and, if there’s an upcoming event, invite her to participate. You’ve not only made a new friend, but have also met one of the many Antiochian Women in the Archdiocese.

In closing, we hearken back to that blessed morning when the myrrhbearing women arrived at Christ’s tomb. Finding it empty, the women were asked by the angel, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!” (Luke 24:5-6). From this event, we learn that the WOMEN were the first who received the glorious news of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, and they went and preached the news to others. Let us, as Antiochian Women, follow their example in our thoughts, words, and deeds, throughout not just this Lenten season and Pascha, but in every day of our lives.

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