

❖ ANNUAL REPORT ❖

Tell Me a Story



ST. VLADIMIR'S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Studying Theology

TAMARA GRDZELIDZE, ALUMNA 1993

I BEGAN TO STUDY THEOLOGY FORMALLY AT ST. VLADIMIR’S SEMINARY, and then went on to earn a doctoral degree from the University of Oxford. Later, I served in Geneva, Switzerland, as an Orthodox Programme Executive for the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order, which coordinates dialogue between churches on Christian unity.

About eight years ago, at a conference in Cambridge, UK, I was presenting a paper about the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos. I was impressed by another participant, who spoke about another monastery on Mount Athos, but to top it off, he was Ambassador of his country to the Holy See.

In this Annual Report, with its theme “Tell Me a Story,” you will hear other life stories from more recent seminarians from St. Vladimir’s, students just beginning their new ministries.

Oh, I thought, *that it is so cool!*

That’s the story of my life: I find myself in places I never planned to be, but in retrospect, they seem to have been designed just for me. Such was the case as well when I was a seminarian at St. Vladimir’s: meeting Father John Meyendorff, studying with Father John Breck and Professor Paul Meyendorff, learning how to bake prosphora from Father Tom Hopko, being instructed in the choir by Father Paul Lazor, and meeting my future supervisor Metropolitan Kallistos Ware—all were part of a larger design for my life. (And what a luxurious life, I think now, to be a poor student and to study theology in New York and Oxford!)

When studying patristics, I would never have dreamt of working in ecumenical relations; however, while working as an Orthodox theologian in the Faith and Order Commission, I was obliged to face the challenging realities in our Church, and my love for it became stronger. Now, as Ambassador of Georgia to the Holy See, my ecumenical experience has found its fulfillment.

In this Annual Report, with its theme “Tell me a story,” you will hear other life stories from more recent seminarians from St. Vladimir’s (pages 5–12), students just beginning their new ministries.

I can assure these students that studying theology can truly lead one on a mysterious path!

ABOVE: Alumna Tamara Grdzeldze, presenting the ‘Letter of Credence’—a formal letter from the President of Georgia, sending her as Ambassador of Georgia to the Holy See—to Pope Francis.

PHOTO: L’Osservatore Romano

The Inside Story

I LOVE—I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED—BOOKS.

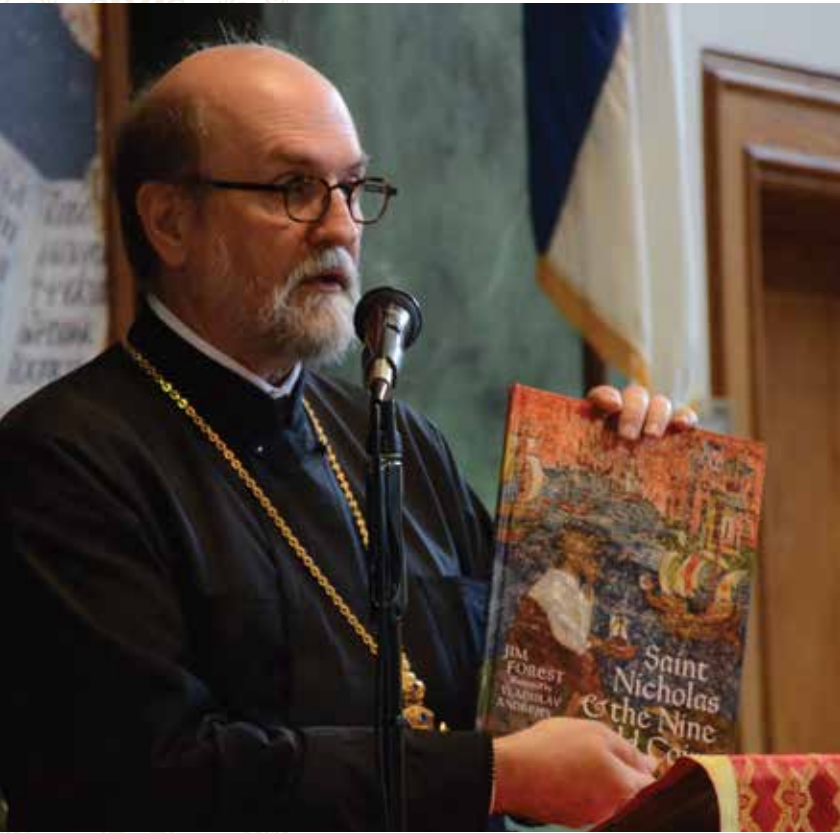
They were instrumental in my conversion from my ethnic Anglo-Saxon religion to the Orthodox Christian faith, and in my embrace of the teachings of the Church. My extensive reading readied me to sacrifice whatever might be required (pension, parish) to possess what I came to look upon as the “Pearl of Great Price” (MATTHEW 13:46).

But I soon came to realize that “book-learning” could not provide me with the “inside story” that I’ve come to experience as a member of the body of Christ. Now, within the body of believers, I’ve become part of a larger story that spans more than two millennia, and I realize that all my reading cannot compare to my present status as a character actively participating within the continuing pages of this astounding history!

I can say the same for my initial views of St. Vladimir’s Seminary.

As an outsider, I knew (and had read) that the Seminary was the home of great minds that had formed generations of seminarians to serve in Orthodox churches worldwide. I had knowledge of the Seminary’s spiritual life and liturgical rhythm, and of its history and mission. I knew it as the renowned Academy that had laid the groundwork for an English-speaking, evangelical-minded Orthodox Church in the New World. I knew it as the “jewel” of Orthodoxy in our land.

When I became Chancellor/CEO of St. Vladimir’s, I was able to affirm all of my outsider perspectives. What I didn’t know, what I had to experience as an insider, was the extreme labor that had been required for the Seminary to emerge as a diamond in the rough—and what further enormous effort it will take to ensure that this jewel does not lose its luster.



We have chosen “Tell me a story” as this year’s theme for our Annual Report. As you read the personal stories of our students, alumni, and Dean Emeritus Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko (+2015), you will be reminded why St. Vladimir’s Seminary matters, and hopefully, you will be moved to ensure its continuation through your annual donations, planned bequests, and endowed projects and programs—for without your help, our story will end.

I love—I have always loved—books.

But more than books, I love the experience of being able to “write the next chapter” in the history of St. Vladimir’s, bearing in mind and building upon the great storyline written by my predecessors. I invite you to become a contributing author. Come, help me, and help our students, tell the next generation a wondrous tale.

With love and affection in Christ,

Fr. Chad Hatfield

THE VERY REVEREND DR. CHAD HATFIELD, CHANCELLOR/CEO

As you read the personal stories of our students, alumni, and Dean Emeritus Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko (+2015), you will be reminded why St. Vladimir’s Seminary matters.

ABOVE LEFT: Father Chad Hatfield, dedicating a new SVS Press children’s book to alumnus Father Nikola Čeko
PHOTO: Andreana Čeko

Coming Home

I began to realize that the internal world of St. Vladimir's is as vast or universal as the light that it emanates.



ABOVE: Father John Behr, at home in Thbee Hierarchs Chapel
PHOTO: Leanne Parrott

COMING TO ST. VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY was coming home, although as a British citizen, I still remain a "resident alien"! But then, aren't we all "aliens," as the *Letter to Diognetus* reminds us Christians: "every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign country." My wife, Kate, and I have spent almost all our married life living on campus, and soon the time spent will amount to over half our entire lives.

I grew up in Russian émigré circles in the United Kingdom, reading the works of the great émigré theologians, especially Fathers Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann, and John Meyendorff. I knew St. Vladimir's as a beacon for Orthodox theology and liturgy, but never thought it would have any part in my future, or I in its. Towards the end of my doctoral work, I was invited, by the ever-memorable Father Thomas Hopko, to come to teach—initially for one year—receiving this invitation on my birthday no less!

Arriving at St Vladimir's, I truly found myself at home, although in the circles that had come through France, rather than through England, to make their home in the new world. My first impression when I arrived at the Seminary was how small it is: the small campus nestled away in American suburbia didn't seem to match the reputation of St. Vladimir's in the world of Orthodoxy and beyond. Yet as soon as the school year picked up, I began to realize that the internal world of St. Vladimir's is as vast or universal as the light that it emanates.

The Seminary is a microcosm of the universal and eternal Church of Christ, and is so in a concentrated manner: a "seminary" is, by definition, a greenhouse or "hothouse"(!), where seeds are planted and nourished, intently and intensively, so that they might grow over the few years in which students are with us, so that they might bear ever more fruit when they leave and begin their life of ministry in many different contexts.

St. Vladimir's has, in a unique way, the role of speaking from the Church, to the Church, and to the world. This is a role that the Seminary has long played, and as the world is changing ever more rapidly and in previously unthinkable ways, it is clear that we are called to speak ever more forcefully and expansively.

The Orthodox Church in the traditional Orthodox lands has found itself in ever more difficult circumstances, while in the new lands it is confronted with new, previously unthinkable, challenges. As heirs to the great intellectual theological traditions of the East, and having found a new voice in the West, we are in a unique position to speak the same eternal truths with newly minted words—through our professors, through our alumni, through our press, and through all the avenues offered by new media.

But we can only do so with your support. Please, make my home, *our home*.

Faithfully,


THE VIKY REVEREND DR. JOHN BEHR, DEAN

Tale of Two Seminaries

BECAUSE OF MY ETHNIC HERITAGE, I have one foot planted firmly in the U.S. and the other foot planted firmly on Serbian soil. I'm retired President and Publisher of Ohio's main newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, but I regularly read the *American Srbobran*. I'm a parishioner at St. Theodosius Cathedral, a parish of the Orthodox Church in America, and I'm also a member of St. Sava Cathedral, a parish under the Patriarchate of Serbia. I'm Lifetime Director of Services at United Way of Greater Cleveland, and I'm Honorary Consul of the Republic of Serbia.

Likewise, my heart reserves spaces for two amazing seminaries: St. Vladimir's in Yonkers, New York, and Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Prizren, Kosovo.

I fell in love with "St. Vlad's" when the late Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko—whose personal story is on pages 13–17 of this Annual Report—invited me to be the main speaker at Commencement ceremonies, nearly 20 years ago.

But I recently had the privilege of co-leading a group of IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities) supporters to Kosovo-Metohija and Montenegro, to visit partner monasteries, soup kitchens, and other IOCC projects that help the poor, the elderly, children, and paraplegics. My most indelible experience occurred in Prizren, Kosovo, an area where Serbian Orthodox Christians have been brutalized beyond belief.

Ss. Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Christian Seminary was founded in 1871 in the heart of Prizren, by its first benefactor Semeon-Sima Andrejevic Igumanov. In 1999 it was closed due to the war in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija, and all students and professors were evacuated. In the infamous pogrom of March 2004 it was burned to the ground. But through the extraordinary leadership of Bishop Teodosija and generous partners, the seminary was rebuilt in 2011. Still surrounded by hostilities, it currently houses 53 seminarians and 10 full-time professors.

As Executive Chair of St. Vladimir's Seminary's Board of Trustees, I wonder: Cannot the improbable rebuilding of Ss. Cyril and Methodius Seminary, accomplished through the love and determination of the people of Kosovo, challenge us in the U.S., with our freedom and resources, to ensure the financial sustainability of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary as the citadel of Orthodox Christian education in the midst of a secular, self-absorbed society?

I'm grateful for my rich Serbian heritage and my U.S. citizenship, and I plan to keep sharing the immeasurable blessings I've received from them in both my worlds. I'd like you to join me in supporting St. Vladimir's Seminary, an institution dedicated to serving Christ and His Church. Let's firmly follow in His footsteps, and stride forward together.

Sincerely,


ALEX MACHASKEE, EXECUTIVE CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES



RIGHT: Alex Machaskee visiting Ss. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Prizren PHOTO: Nikola Culic, IOCC photographer

Once upon a time...

STORIES *from* SEMINARIANS

Sowing Seeds, Reaping Blessings

SHAWN THOMAS

MASTER OF DIVINITY PROGRAM, 3RD YEAR

*Seminarians preaching under the canopy of a tree in Turkana*

During Holy Week and Bright Week 2015, we three seminarians—Edward Hunter, Lijin Raju, and I—traveled to Kenya on a mission trip sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). We made three stops, and at the last stop, I believe a miracle happened.

Our first stop was the Orthodox Patriarchal Ecclesiastical School of Makarios III Archbishop of Cyprus, in Nairobi. There we witnessed the somber Holy Week services in English, Greek, and Swahili. On Holy Friday, His Eminence Makarios, the school's namesake, led everyone in procession from St. George's Cathedral through the impoverished slum of Kibera. As we sang "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal," over and over again, we brought a message of hope amidst disease, chaos, and death.

Our next stop was Turkana, a two-hour flight northwest. Unlike the people of Nairobi, who spoke English, ate fast food, and wore Western dress, the villagers of Turkana wore traditional tribal dress and adhered to local languages and customs. During the first part of Bright Week, they listened raptly as Fathers Vladimir, Moses, and Zechariah (priests of their local parishes) translated the catechetical lessons we three had prepared.

Then came our last stop, a place far out into the desert, in a locale that could have served as the model for Broadway's *The Lion King* set.

Under the immense canopy of a huge tree, people from three villages had come together to hear us preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Half were Christian, the other half were not. Significantly, the predominantly male portion of the crowd was not Christian, and in this African culture the men decided everything. So, I wondered, why had these men given their permission for the villagers to gather?

I soon found out: each previous time a group from OCMC had come to preach, rain also had come, and in an environment as dry as Turkana, rain is viewed a gift from God.

So, we began to preach. *And as we preached, it began to rain.*

By using rain, God prepared rich, receptive soil in the hearts of our listeners for the seeds we were sowing! Afterwards, the leading men gave permission to Father Martin Ritsi, OCMC's Director, who had accompanied us on the trip, to return with more missionaries and more messages. Ed, Lijin, and I are considering doing just that, as the Lord wills, and as He commands the heavens to rain. ✂

Four Things I've Learned... So Far

FATHER THEOPHAN WHITFIELD

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM, 2ND YEAR
MASTER OF DIVINITY GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2010

Here are four things I've learned... so far:

1 *Pastors have experience, and the Church needs it.* I am called to think about ministry, both because it makes me a better priest, and also because the Church needs me to do so. Pastors have an obligation to reflect and share so that, armed to the teeth, we might help others confront the uncertainties of an unfolding future. Our coursework and projects will no doubt be used by the Holy Spirit to ensure that the gates of hell will not prevail against the rock of our confession.

2 *Time is on my side.* Early on I was concerned that "one more thing" would dynamite the delicate constellation of work and family (and Netflix) that already trembles each time the church phone rings. Yes, the work takes time. I cannot dash it off between coffee hour and a post-liturgical nap. But the distance-learning format of the program allows me to find time in surprising places.

3 *"I am not pursuing a doctorate, "we" are.* St. Vladimir's takes the "cohort" vision seriously. I entered the program with ten others from eight jurisdictions, and by design we work closely, proceeding together. We offer one another encouragement, feedback, and an abundance of joyful fellowship.

4 *"There is a difference between being self-emptying and self-draining"* (quote from Father Nicholas Solak, my D.Min. professor). It is easy to lose myself in ministry, to erase needed boundaries that protect my authenticity as a pastor. The program reminds me that ministry is hard, and that success often defies expectations. I am encouraged when I step back and see the wide scope of excellent ministry that is ongoing in the body of Christ.

The D.Min. program is connecting me to fellow pastors, my Lord, and myself. I look forward to learning lesson number five! ✂

*Father Theophan, giving Holy Communion to a young parishioner*
PHOTO: Richard Johnson

What Am I Supposed to Do with All This?

LIJIN HANNAH RAJU
MASTER OF ARTS GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2015



Lijin speaking at a youth retreat

People often don't understand why I'm at seminary.

"What are you going to do with a theology degree?" "Are you trying to be a priest?" "You're wasting your years. You need to get married soon!" "Are you going to be a nun?" I have learned to smile with gratitude for these questions, as they provide me with motivation to move forward.

I grew up in a clergy household. My parents' genuine selflessness and love gave me a foretaste of God's unconditional love. They lived ready to serve the Lord and His people and illustrated to me that the word "serve" wasn't limited to merely their parish.

My dad could answer all my "God and Church" questions, and I envied that. As a result, I believe God created in me a strong desire to study theology—a desire that began in high school.

As the years passed, I started to see a need in our Church for lay leadership and guidance for many young Orthodox Christians, especially for college students. At that point, my reason for wanting a theological education changed from how seminary could serve me to how seminary could prepare me to serve the larger community.

When I landed at St. Vladimir's, my expectations of what seminary life would be like were quickly debunked. I struggled with balancing schoolwork, church life, and my personal relationships.

Simultaneously, God worked on me. I had to focus more on drawing closer to God to achieve that balance. I had to rely on His power rather than willpower. I had to concentrate on approaching problems with His Spirit rather than cramming my mind with historical or doctrinal facts. In other words, I had to let God work *in me*, before I worked *for Him*.

Upon graduation, I plan to incorporate my formal studies in psychology and theology into my study for a Master of Social Work degree. As I move forward, I will keep in mind and heart the words that our Dean, Father John Behr, spoke at orientation on my first day at the Seminary: "You are not here to find yourself but to find Christ."

The confusing questions in life are myriad, but drawing near to Christ is the answer to them all. ✂

Glory to Thee Who Has Shown Us the Light

RAMI DAHDAL
MASTER OF DIVINITY GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2015

Have you ever been on a roller coaster that zips through dark twisted tunnels and then bursts into the light? That illustrates my spiritual journey as a seminarian: up and down, with loop-de-loops thrown in for good measure, and finally, a clear, bright horizon ahead.

I believe the Lord designed my particular "spiritual ride" to give me the flexibility, stamina, and the know-how needed to become His servant. But, I surely experienced some uncomfortable jolts, sharp dips, and slow climbs along the way!

As part of my journey, I adhered to an amazingly rigorous schedule of daily and weekly liturgical services, topped off by longer services for feast days and fasting seasons, plus weekend and Great Lenten assignments at local Antiochian Orthodox Christian parishes. (And at times, I had to re-tune my ears to accommodate traditional Russian chant!)

Additionally, I fulfilled my campus assignments: chapel duty, meal crew, and janitorial duty; preparation for special events; participation in Student Council; choir rehearsal; and even a stint as photographer for the Advancement Department. As I raced up and down the campus attending to all these duties (besides my coursework), I began to realize: "This is the life of a priest. This is the meaning of the Scripture: 'You are not your own'" (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19). Priestly ministry is a life of service to others—period.

That Scripture stuck with me during the summer after my first year at the Seminary, as I fulfilled my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) internship at Banner Good Samaritan Hospital in Phoenix,

Arizona. Hands down, CPE—a requirement of the Master of Divinity program at St. Vladimir's—proved to be the best part of my three-year ride.

I performed 400 hours of patient visitation and self-reflection in the classroom, which sharpened my listening and communications skills. Noting CPE's value, I decided to accept a residency position at Wesley Medical Center, Wichita, Kansas, after graduation, with the intention of someday becoming a certified CPE Chaplain.

On a roller coaster, the forces of acceleration and gravity can be jarring when in opposition, making you feel heavy, or they can be exhilarating when in conjunction, making you feel light, almost weightless—just as any spiritual journey contains sorrow and joy. Nevertheless, I've bought a ticket for my next ride, for I know that corkscrew tunnels eventually lead to glorious light. ✂



*Rami Dahdal at his newest CPE challenge
at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas*

On the Job Training

FATHER THEODOR SVANE

MASTER OF DIVINITY GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2015

The day I was ordained, I was given a cross by my bishop.

I was, by the grace of God, a priest. I looked like one, but I did not necessarily feel like one. Seminary had prepared me well for ordination, and I would not have been able to respond to the calling without that foundation. But at the same time seminary is not a parish, and it could only teach me so much.

Coming from the Orthodox Church in Norway—a tiny community in a predominantly secular country—I had hoped that during my time at St. Vladimir's, my family and I would gain a broader experience of an Orthodox Church that exists within a culture similar to our own. I have not been disappointed.

During my days as a seminarian, and now, following my graduation, I was very blessed to be warmly welcomed as an assistant into three very different and dynamic parishes of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA): St. James Orthodox Church, in Beaufort, South Carolina, St. Katherine of Alexandria Orthodox Mission, in San Diego, California, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Church in Santa Rosa, California, where I am currently serving as an assistant priest. These parishes are thriving and expanding under their respective



Father Theodor with wife, Hanne, and Simon, on the day of his ordination

pastors, who also happen to be St. Vladimir's alumni: Father James Bozeman, Father Andrew Cuneo, and Father Lawrence Margitich.

In these parishes, I served, preached, visited parishioners, and performed administrative tasks—as well as manual labor! With my family, I toured neighboring Orthodox parishes, gaining new perspectives about how to grow a mission parish and how to handle a long-established parish.

My experiences have been greatly rewarding. But through it all, I have come to realize that one can never be completely prepared for the priesthood. There will always be some sense in which it is foreign and unnatural, because life in Christ is foreign, alien, unnatural to the world we live in—and to my fallen nature.

Yet Christ calls me to take up my cross and follow Him. To unite with Him. Daily.

And so, daily, I literally take the cross given to me at my ordination, hang it around my neck, and remind myself that my life belongs to Him. And as I struggle to live as a priest in Him who is the High Priest, I remember His promise that He will always be faithful to everyone who takes up his cross and follows Him. ✂

Delicately Perched

KATHRYN ANI ASHBAHIAN

MASTER OF ARTS GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2015

Our churches hardly need to call a council of ecumenists... we have our own in the classroom, in the refectory, and in the dorms!

As a student both at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and St. Vladimir's Seminary, I am delicately perched between two vibrant institutions that offer unique perspectives into Orthodox Christianity. During my first year, I was vastly unprepared for the academic, social, and spiritual whiplash my situation induced: a commute between schools made 4–6 times daily, paper and project due dates colliding, community service at both schools, and a deep ache caused by our churches not being in communion.

Craving stability and uniformity, I initially clung to the familiarity of my Armenian seminary family, but I soon found great joy in letting go and allowing God to work within me and through me at both schools. In the midst of rediscovering and embracing my Armenian inheritance and faith, I allowed my new Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters to teach me a wonderful lesson: differences in our traditions need not cause me to shy away; rather, they invite me to explore deeply, learn deeply, and love deeply.

Our churches hardly need to call a council of ecumenists... we have our own in the classroom, in the refectory, and in the dorms! I have broken bread, shared notes, and watched movies with my classmates. I have attended morning services in Three Hierarchs Chapel and exposed my ears to four-part-harmony elation. Over cups of tea, walks to class, and conversations at mealtimes, I have tied myself irrevocably to the people alongside whom I learn.

I consider my waking, sleeping, studying, and feasting daily acts of ecumenism. I would not trade the experiences (the good, the bad, and the awkward) I have had with my St. Vladimir's family for anything, for they have taught me precious lessons about grace and godly communion.

All great challenges present great opportunities for great growth. I thank the Lord with all my heart for gently, yet firmly, nudging me along in the direction of discovery, development, and wholeness, and for delicately setting me on a perch where I could see the bigger picture—and a broader horizon. ✂



Kathryn perched on the shores of Enders Island, Mystic, Connecticut, during a lenten retreat hosted by St. Nersess Seminary

Beating Around the Spiritual Bush

NIKITA ANDREJEV

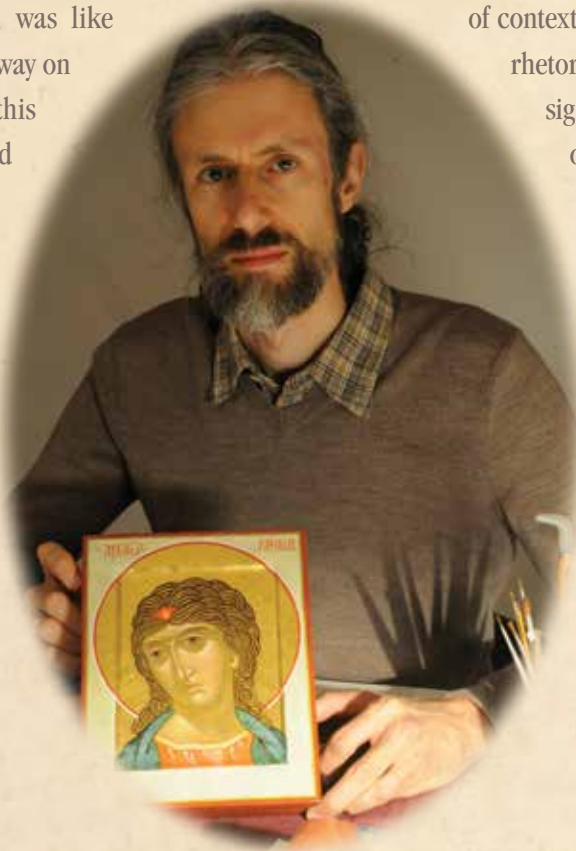
MASTER OF ARTS GRADUATE, CLASS OF 2015

My intentions in pursuing theological study at St. Vladimir's Seminary were less practical than those of most of my classmates.

Through God's mercy, my vocation in life had been set—iconographer and instructor—and I didn't particularly need another degree. But I kept realizing that despite my "religious" occupation, and despite four years of theological education at St. Sergius Institute in Paris, I seldom focused on Christ and His invisible working. Proverbially, I still was beating around the spiritual bush, and was lacking a convincing "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (EPHESIANS 4:13).

So much of what I did, I realized, was like non-essential chaff that will be burned away on the Last Day (MATTHEW 3:12). I ventured this scriptural idea not only concerned pointless aspects of life—sitting aimlessly on the couch—but also applied to activities deemed "good," or even "Christian," unless they possessed a concrete foundation in Jesus Christ (1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–15).

I entered St. Vladimir's Seminary in pursuit of that foundation. Although I knew theological education could not guarantee spiritual maturity, I began training the muscle that is my mind (as our Dean suggested).



Nikita Andreyev, in his studio, with one of his hand-painted icons

The "mind" is a key term in the anthropology of many of the church fathers. To "hold the mind in check" when stray thoughts attempt to seduce it, and to train the "mind's eye" to be attentive to the manifestations of the Divine Word, mark the path of spiritual progress. Soon I discovered that these two rules concerning the mind applied not only to my personal ascetic discipline but also to my classroom reading assignments.

Exercising an active but sober mind, I learned to read church writers very closely, with sensitivity towards their original intentions and particular genius, and with attention to the organization of their written works. As well, I learned the relevance of context and literary style, and the importance of rhetoric. My professors offered valuable insights concerning methodology—instead of dogmatic formulas to be memorized.

My original intention in coming to the Seminary was to spend more time absorbing church teachings, but I came away with something more important: a mind more cultivated to *perceive* church teachings. My seminary training granted me, by God's Grace, a token of maturity, and I will struggle to increase it—but at least I've stopped running in circles, and have found the "narrow path"

(MATTHEW 7:13). ✂

The Way of a Pilgrim

ABRAAM MIKHAIL

MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM, 2ND YEAR

Two years ago St. Vladimir's Seminary wasn't even on my mind.

I was tucked away on the other side of the world, in Australia—16,500 kilometers away! Having just finished my physical therapy degree and taken employment in a comfortable private practice, I was reporting to honest bosses and enjoying the type of supportive environment that many new graduates can only dream of.

Then everything changed. My bishop, His Grace Suriel, dean of St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College (SACOTC), commissioned me to study for a Master of Arts degree at St. Vladimir's, with the intention of someday having me return to SACOTC as a lecturer.

When I landed on the seminary campus, I certainly stood out, with my accent, vocabulary, and unique spelling of words (e.g., "colour" and "centre"). However, I wasn't the only one with an unusual background. Everyone I met on campus had a story, a unique experience to share and something inspiring to say. My carefully kept journal is filled with comments



Abraam (center) with Bishop Suriel, dean of St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College, and Father John Behr, dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary

and observations by professors and fellow seminarians, which have triggered for me days of subsequent reflection—words echoing in my mind and reverberating within, shaping and sharpening my being.

Of even greater value have been the methodological skills I've gathered in the classroom. There, I received tools, not just

facts: how to read the church fathers, how to prepare a spiritual reflection on a biblical text, how to analyze primary historical documents. I even took a course in Hebrew, which opened up for me the beauty of the Old Testament text in ways that I could never have imagined.

Like a sojourning pilgrim, I'm traveling where the Lord leads, not knowing the way but holding His steady hand, while trusting in His wisdom and growing in His love. For me, two years ago cannot be marked linearly by minutes, hours, days, or months, but only by space, for I've entered a new dimension, a place where the number of my footsteps is measured by my proximity to Christ, and where time opens up into eternity. ✂

And they all live—happily in our hearts—ever after.

Remembering My Days as a Seminarian & My Professors 1957–1963*

PROTOPRESBYTER THOMAS HOPKO, PH.D. (+MARCH 18, 2015)

DEAN EMERITUS, SEMINARY DIPLOMA, CLASS OF 1963

Coming to the Seminary

I heard about St. Vladimir's in 1956, from a friend, Frank Kulik, now a psychiatrist in Jackson, Mississippi and a staunch seminary supporter. Frank was a freshman at Drew University in New Jersey, while I was enrolled at a small college in upstate New York. He phoned to tell me of a seminar he had attended at Drew on the theme of Russian Orthodoxy. He was particularly impressed by one of the speakers, a young priest named Father Alexander Schmemmann, a teacher at St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York City. He suggested that we travel to find out more about St Vladimir's, during our Easter vacation in 1957.

Driving to New York City in my father's black and white Chevy (which unfortunately, by the conclusion of our trip, needed a new clutch), we approached the Seminary's neighborhood, Morningside Heights, looking for golden cupolas. Instead we found a six-story tenement on the corner of Broadway and 121st Street. The Seminary was housed in several apartments while its classes were held in rooms (usually the boiler room) at Union Theological Seminary. After locating the office and chapel on the second floor, we found Father Schmemmann's apartment on the fourth floor and rang his bell. A gray-haired woman with black wire-frame glasses informed us that Father would be back later. I said to Frank, "I thought you said that Father Schmemmann was young. His wife sure looks old!"

**This article was first published on the seminary website in 2003 under the title "Remembering our Leaders (1957–1983)," on the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the founding of the Seminary in 1938. It reflects Father Thomas's wonderful ability to tell a story with thoughtfulness, candor, and humor. Our seminary community misses and pays homage to him, as our former Dean who reposed in the Lord this past year, and as the man whom we remember as always speaking the "truth in love" (EPHESIANS 4:15).*



However she wasn't his wife, but a woman named "Vava" who helped the Schmemmann household—its young working "matushka" and their three children, and several seminarians. Later that day we met with Father Schmemmann, Father Daniel Hubiak, and Nicholas Ozerov (all of whom, I noted, smoked Camels.) They assured us that we would be most welcome at St. Vladimir's, but we needed to enroll in a bachelor's program at an area college. This requirement suited me, since my father insisted that I obtain a college degree. He wanted people to know that if I became a priest it was "by choice," and not because I was "too dumb to study or too lazy to work."

Such was a widely held view in those days when, as my schoolmate, the late Father John Psinka, would say, "few were called and all were chosen."

. . .

Driving to New York City in my father's black and white Chevy, we approached the Seminary's neighborhood, Morningside Heights, looking for golden cupolas. Instead we found a six-story tenement on the corner of Broadway and 121st Street.

. . .

When I arrived at the Seminary the fall of that same year, the door was opened to me by another entering seminarian named Frank Lazor, later to be known as Metropolitan Theodosius of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). After spending my first night, I was awakened by Kostya Kallaur (now a university professor and faithful seminary supporter), who told me that we had work to do: Union Seminary was discarding old beds, tables, and lamps, which would be useful in our apartments. I'll never forget my first day in seminary, pushing a heavily loaded dolly many times across Broadway while cars screeched by, blowing their horns.

The Seminary had no refectory, so we ate as we could, mostly cooking for ourselves in our apartment kitchens. I (happily) lost thirty pounds my first semester. You can imagine my joy in going home for winter break with my new "ascetical seminarian look."

Living at the Seminary

There were about twenty-five seminarians in 1957. Around half of us were "pre-theological" (sometimes referred to as "pre-logical"). Approximately ten were Antiochians sent by Metropolitan Anthony Bashir. Two part-time students were women: a Copt from Egypt and a convert called "Lady Pepys" from England. Frank Kulik and I shared Apartment #63, along with a Japanese, a Serb, a Romanian, a post-WWII Russian refugee, and a couple of "Americans" like ourselves.

I learned to imitate each of their signatures in order to sign everyone's name on the "sign-in sheet" that we slipped under Professor Serge Verhovskoy's door at ten o'clock each night—proof that we were home by curfew. Professor Verhovskoy (then written and pronounced Ver-hov-sky, with the accent on the second syllable) was the Provost and also the de facto Dean of Students. The Seminary rector was Metropolitan Leonty, primate of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America (since 1970, the "OCA"). He had assigned himself to this position after Father Georges Florovsky left St. Vladimir's to go to Harvard and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary in 1955.

Metropolitan Leonty

Metropolitan Leonty, while still a young archpriest in the 1910s, had been Dean of an Orthodox seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. However from 1923 to 1938, the Russian government confiscated many properties belonging to what was then considered the "American mission," and no Orthodox theological schools in North America existed during this interval. It was

after this period, in 1938, that both a graduate school in New York City and a pastoral school at St. Tikhon's Monastery in Pennsylvania opened.

As it happened, 1938 was the 950th anniversary of the baptism of Kievan Rus by the Holy and Great Prince Vladimir. Appropriately, the school was dedicated to St. Vladimir, both to honor the anniversary and to emphasize the school's missionary character.

I remember well Metropolitan Leonty's visits to the Seminary, and our visits to his cathedral on Second Street, where we seminarians would go to serve, read, and sing. He was a majestic man of striking spiritual nobility, dignity, and humility. He loved to joke, asking us, with a sly smile and twinkling eyes, if we could read Hebrew and Greek, taunting us with feigned severity that it was impossible for us to understand the Holy Scriptures without such knowledge. He would say that when he retired he would come to the Seminary to teach Hebrew.

. . .

I was blessed to see Metropolitan Leonty on his deathbed. I think he should be canonized a saint.

. . .

Metropolitan Leonty laid the foundation for the Seminary library by securing at his own expense the thousands of books and journals collected by Father Anthony Repella. I cataloged many of them during the summer of 1960, and afterwards, as my seminary job. This gave me an air of knowledge of Russian theological literature that was quite deceiving, since all I did was skim each volume to determine, quite unprofessionally, how it should be identified and shelved.

Metropolitan Leonty died in 1965, after having officially appointed Father Alexander Schmemmann, whom he deeply admired, as seminary Dean in 1962. I was blessed to see Metropolitan Leonty on his deathbed. I think he should be canonized a saint.

Father Schmemmann & Professor Verhovskoy

Under Father Alexander Schmemmann's leadership, St. Vladimir's came to be so joined with his person and work that it was known—affectionately and not so affectionately—as the "schmemmannary." The connection (almost identification in

some circles) of St. Vladimir's with Father Alexander was understandable, but also seriously misleading, in that many others played enormous roles in the life of the school. First among them was the aforementioned Professor Sergei Sergeevich Verhovskoy whom everyone at the school called "Prof."

Prof was the Seminary's bulwark and anchor. He lived at the school from his arrival from France in 1951 until his death in 1986. He loved meeting with the seminarians, favoring especially the women students and seminarians' wives, of whom he was the most devoted advocate. In addition to his teaching he was the Seminary's Provost and financial officer, largely involved in finding the property in Crestwood that the Seminary occupied in the fall of 1962. He loved the Crestwood campus. Woe to the member of the grounds crew who trimmed a tree without Prof's approval!

. . .

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. . .

Professor Verhovskoy taught dogmatic and moral theology (which he pronounced "feeology"), and lots of other things as well. He clearly considered himself the strongest (if not the sole) defender of Orthodoxy on campus. As his handpicked successor I met with him for several hours every week, even after I began teaching in the graduate division with him in the early 1970s. Prof wanted me to know his thoughts and convictions about everything (most of which I heard many times) before finally turning things over to me. He threatened me with his "eternal malediction" if I ever taught any of my own ideas as church doctrine. He promised me the same malediction if I ever allowed the Seminary to cut one minute of the six semesters of required dogmatics. I think I'm still out of harm's way in regard to the former threat.

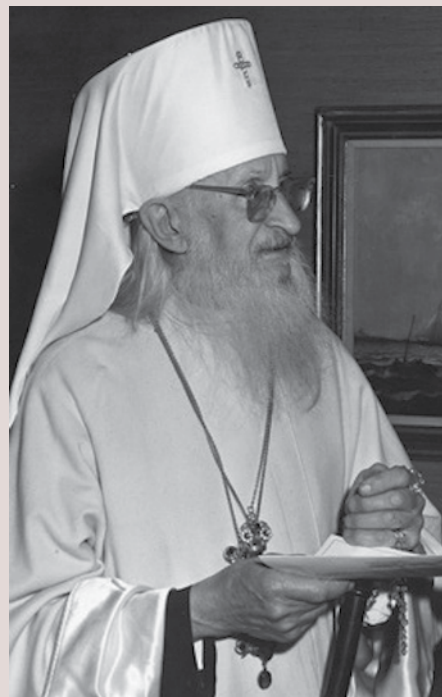
Dr. Arseniev, Dr. Kesich & Father Meyendorff

Professor Nicholas Arseniev taught from the mid-1950s until shortly before his death in 1977. He was almost totally blind until near the end of his life, when he had corrective surgery. We couldn't bear to watch him cross the New York City streets in traffic, not only because of his terrible eyesight but also because he usually walked in a state of mystical ecstasy. He knew about fifteen languages, ancient and modern, and once asked me in all seriousness if I knew Sanskrit! I replied that I hardly knew English. He quoted the Greek New Testament from memory (often holding the book upside down because of his poor eyesight), Dante in Italian, John of the Cross in Spanish, Goethe in German, and Pascal in French. When I was in college at Fordham, doing philosophy and Russian studies, and not yet in the Seminary's graduate program, I was allowed to take Dr. Arseniev's elective courses on mysticism, Russian religious literature, and comparative religions. I heard many of his lectures before ever having exposure to the lectures of Father Schmemmann, Professor Verhovskoy, or Father Meyendorff. His lectures were always charged with the power of the boundless love of God, given to us lavishly, freely—"pressed down and pouring over" in Christ (LUKE 6:38).

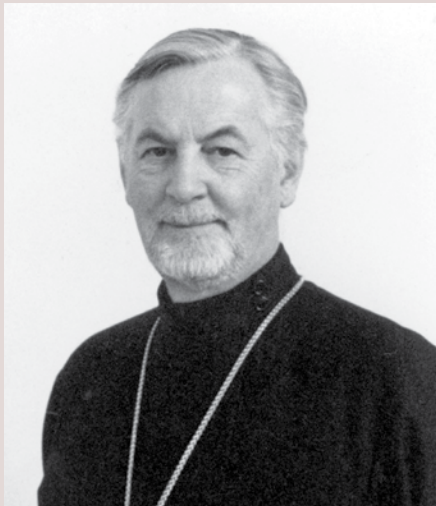
The young Dr. Veselin Kesich taught New Testament with Dr. Arseniev, as well as Greek, early Christianity, and Serbian subjects. He was the first St. Vladimir's alumnus to get a doctorate in America and then join the seminary faculty. Over the years he became an SVS institution: that is, one could not imagine St. Vladimir's without him. Sadly, because of scheduling, I took only one New Testament course from Dr. Kesich. His presence at the school during my student years, and since, has been one of God's great graces in my life.

Father John Meyendorff came to the Seminary from France in 1959, and played an enormous role in the life of the school. He was Dean from 1984 until 1992, when he retired and unexpectedly died. Father John suffered much over us—his rough and uncultivated students—and yet how he loved us, cared for us, and inspired us, not only by his extraordinary learning but also by his childlike love for liturgical worship and wholehearted devotion to the service of the Church.

Father John helped me personally in countless ways. He was my professor both at the Seminary and during my doctoral studies at Fordham. He was also my confessor, advisor, mentor,

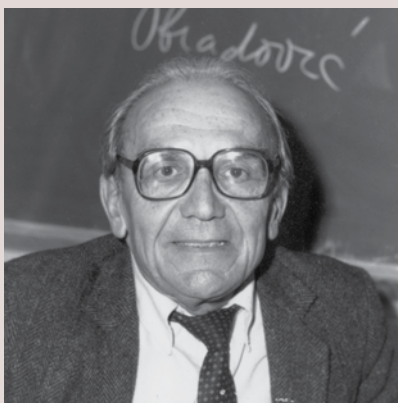


ABOVE:
Metropolitan Leonty



RIGHT, FROM TOP:
Father Alexander Schmemmann, Professor
Sergei Sergeevich Verhovskoy, Dr. Nicholas
Arseniev, Dr. Veselin Kesich, Father John
Meyendorff, St. Vladimir's faculty, 1958

BELOW:
Mrs. Sophie Koulomzin



friend, and (sometimes, sadly for me) my severest critic. I babysat his children and, with other seminarians (and my future wife), often had coffee at his apartment with Matushka Maika after liturgies. (I never had the courage to tell him, while working under him in the library, that the first syllable of the word “duplicate” does not rhyme with “cup.”)

...

*Dr. Arseniev knew about fifteen languages,
ancient and modern, and once asked me
in all seriousness if I knew Sanskrit!*

...

These five men were as different from one another as could be found on the face of the earth. God truly had a sense of humor and divine purpose in bringing them together. They didn't always like each other and sometimes sharply criticized one another in both theological and practical matters. None was without his personal limitations, weaknesses, and sins, but each worked together with others marvelously, with dignity. They were able to do so, by God's grace, because whatever their clashes in temperament, formation, manner, and conviction, they were in complete solidarity about the essentials of Orthodox Christianity and the mission of St. Vladimir's Seminary.

Others of Our Leaders

I also recall with gratitude others among my teachers during the middle years of the Seminary's history: Father Paul Schneirla, Father Paul Shafran, Father (later Bishop) Firmilian Ocokoljich, Professor Alexander Bogolepov, Sophie Koulomzin, Nicholas Ozerov, Professor Boris Ledkovsky, and Metropolitan Andrei of the Bulgarian Church were among those who led us.

In 1961 Professor Bogolepov, our Canon Law professor, who also taught Russian and Church Slavonic, published his book (recently reprinted by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press) about establishing a self-governing Orthodox Church in North America. Mrs. Koulomzin, who taught Fathers Schmemmann and Meyendorff as youngsters in France, is world renowned for her work in Orthodox Christian education. Professor Ledkovsky, who directed the choir at the ROCOR cathedral in New York, directed our seminary choir and produced the first St. Vladimir's Seminary recordings of liturgical music. (He once told me that I chanted Church Slavonic with “a Japanese accent.”)

Three of my teachers each exercised the task of expelling me once from their classroom for being disrespectful and rude. Two others had the kindness to allow me to graduate from the Seminary (with appropriately lowered grades) when they discovered shortly before Commencement that I had not fulfilled requirements for their classes, including attendance. (I was given exams and assignments to do after graduation.) And I cannot forget that Professor Verhovskoy called my first sermon in church “impudent and impertinent,” and made me apologize to the pastor after the liturgy.

...

*I cannot forget that Professor Verhovskoy
called my first sermon in church “impudent
and impertinent,” and made me apologize
to the pastor after the liturgy.*

...

My purpose in sharing these memories is not merely to show that, by God's grace and the guidance of compassionate and wise elders, there may be hope for everyone. It is more to convey a sense of the Seminary during its middle years and to honor its leaders. I write to proclaim the extraordinary love, commitment, and sacrifices of these exceptional people who, in the humblest of human conditions, gave their lives to a motley gang of political refugees, war veterans, and workers' kids in order to equip them for service in Christ's Church. No words will ever suffice to hymn the wonders of their countless gifts to us, their spiritual children. ✂

Father Thomas (March 28, 1939–March 18, 2015) began teaching Doctrine and Pastoral Theology at St. Vladimir's Seminary in 1968, eventually becoming a full Professor of Dogmatic Theology in 1991–1992. He rose to the position of seminary Dean in 1992, a post that he held until his retirement one decade later. As a beloved pastor, preeminent preacher, prolific writer, outstanding teacher, and sought after speaker, Father Thomas was known for being a “man of words”—and a spellbinding storyteller!



SVS Press & Bookstore

St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (SVS Press), our publishing house, serves as a missionary arm and profit-making sector for the Seminary. In fiscal year 2015, 9% of the Seminary's annual income came from Press net profits, and Press books were prominent in a multitude of venues, from local parish book studies to international Patristic Conferences, and from prison cells to university classrooms.

PRODUCTION FY2015

New publications	11
Reprints	19

SALES FY2015

Sales	\$ 910,652
Cost of sales	\$ 644,899
Net profit	\$ 265,753

SVS Press Events



ABOVE: In January 2015 representatives of St. Vladimir's Seminary Press and St. Tikhon's Monastery Press, South Canaan, PA, signed a landmark agreement detailing new cooperative efforts in the publication and distribution of Orthodox Christian books and other materials. Signatories were (from left) Fr. John Bebr, seminary Dean, Archimandrite Sergius, abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery, and Fr. Chad Hatfield, seminary Chancellor. PHOTO: SVOTS archives



CENTER: SVS Press honored seminary alumnus Father Nikola Čeko (Master of Divinity, 1985) by formally dedicating its latest children's book, Saint Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins, to him in June 2015. PHOTO: Andreana Čeko



LEFT: In May 2015 SVS Press launched its Coptic Studies Series, with His Grace Anba Suriel, bishop of the Coptic Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions, Australia, as Editor. Here, Bishop Suriel meets with SVS Press Associate Editor Michael Soroka. PHOTO: Dn. Gregory Hatrak

Financials

FOR FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2015

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	
Current assets	\$ 489,867
Investments	\$ 13,485,587
Inventory	\$ 802,418
Fixed assets (land & buildings)	\$ 12,821,853
Other assets	\$ 166,198
Total assets	\$27,765,923
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	
Current liabilities	\$ 463,863
Mortgages & loans payable	\$ 2,858,476
Annuity & life trusts payable	\$ 133,135
Net assets—unrestricted	\$ 11,216,820
Net assets—temp & perm restricted	\$ 13,093,629
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$27,765,923

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 3,606,289
Program service expenses	\$ 3,081,550
Supporting service expenses	\$ 1,829,667
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 4,911,217
Net surplus (deficit)	\$ (1,304,928)
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 25,615,377
NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR	\$ 24,310,449

BELOW: On #GivingTuesday FY2015 , the Seminary gave \$8,000, representing one-tenth of the gifts it received, to Patriarch John X of Antioch, for distribution to suffering Christians in Syria. In 2015, Patriarch John X also was awarded a honorary doctorate during a special academic convocation. Pictured at the convocation (from left) are Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees, His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, His Beatitude John X, and seminary Chancellor/CEO Father Chad Hatfield. PHOTO: Glen Mules



STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	
Net surplus (deficit)	\$ (1,304,928)
Depreciation	\$ 583,045
Investment (gains) losses	\$ 215,740
Net cash from receivables	\$ 128,602
Net cash from inventory	\$ 5,889
Net cash from payables	\$ 36,684
Net cash used in operations	\$ (334,968)

CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES	
Net proceeds from investing	\$ 54,727
Purchase of fixed assets	\$ (30,779)
Net cash provided by investing	\$ 23,948

CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES	
Proceeds of debt	\$ 2,785,098
Repayment of principal on debt	\$ (2,851,039)
Net cash used in financing	\$ (65,941)
Net increase (decrease) in cash	\$ (376,961)
Cash, beginning of year	\$ 381,316
CASH, END OF YEAR	\$ 4,355

RIGHT: Seminarian Father Joshua Trant and family thanking donors for their gifts on #GivingTuesday FY2015, which amounted to \$80,000 PHOTO: Rami Dahdal

THE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION lists the assets, liabilities, and net worth of an institution.

THE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES contains information on revenues and expenses, noting either a positive or negative change in net assets for the fiscal year.

THE STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS lists sources of funding for an institution—from operations, investing activities, and financing activities—and the amount of cash provided by each of these sources.

The Seminary received a clean, unqualified Audit Opinion by independent auditor D’Arcangelo & Co., LLP, Certified Public Accountants & Consultants:

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary as of June 30, 2015, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

View detailed financial reports on the Seminary’s Website, svots.edu.



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JULY 1, 2014– JUNE 30, 2015

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ABOVE: *Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann, Dean of
St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1962–1983* PHOTO: SVOTS archives

LEFT: *Three Hierarchs Chapel, memorial service*
PHOTO: Leanne Parrott

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Board of Trustees with seminary faculty and the Class of 2015 PHOTO: Leanne Parrott

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FAR LEFT: *His Eminence Metropolitan Elia, newly ordained bishop of the Diocese of Oulu of the Orthodox Church of Finland, and seminary alumnus (Master of Divinity, 2003), was the main speaker at Commencement, Saturday, May 30, 2015.*

LEFT: *Seminarian Luke Bullock gave the Valedictory Address.*

PHOTOS: Leanne Parrott

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The Reverend Deacon Dr. George L. Parsenios, Professor of New Testament, receives the “St. Macrina the Great” award from Student Council President Father Theodor Svane, in recognition of his dedication and achievements as a seminary faculty member, at Commencement 2015. PHOTO: Leanne Parrott

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First-year seminarian Andrew Honoré and family



The Seminary paid tribute to Orthodox publishers, authors, and illustrators at its annual Orthodox Education Day, with the theme, “Do Books Still Matter?” Nine publishers showcased their books, among them SVS Press, which just celebrated its 50th anniversary. PHOTO: Rami Dahdal



The Seminary awarded His Eminence The Most Reverend Hilarion (Alfeyev), metropolitan of Volokolamsk and chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. PHOTO: Leanne Parrott



The Most Reverend Elia, Metropolitan of Oulu, Orthodox Church of Finland, the first St. Vladimir’s graduate to be consecrated a bishop in Western Europe (Master of Divinity, 2003), was Commencement Speaker for the Class of 2015, which included 31 graduates. PHOTO: Leanne Parrott



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OCTOBER 2014

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MAY 2015

Listen to Bishop Elia deliver the [2015 Commencement Address](#).

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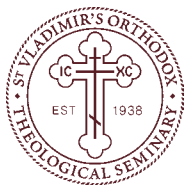
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