



# AHOS Residency – Full Report

# 2025

Antiochian House of Studies  
Antiochian House of Studies  
9/6/2025

# The Antiochian House of Studies Concludes its 2025 Residency at Antiochian Village

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## **Comprehensive Report with Appendices**

Dates: August 22 – September 6, 2025

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## Introduction

The Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) joyfully gathered faculty, students, and friends for the 2025 Residency at the Antiochian Village, held from August 22 to September 6. Over two weeks, participants from across AHOS programs — MTS, SSC, MDiv, and PDd — came together for prayer, study, fellowship, and formation in the life of the Orthodox Church.

This year's Residency was especially blessed by the participation and presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Saba, alongside His Grace Bishop Thomas, His Grace Bishop Theodore Ghandour, and the Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Seraphim Daoud, who together with the AHOS faculty offered guidance, encouragement, and spiritual leadership.



## Week One: A Joyful Beginning

### Opening Ceremony & Welcoming Remarks

The Residency opened on August 22 with a spirit of anticipation and gratitude as students and faculty reunited at the Antiochian Village. The opening ceremony included welcoming addresses from V. Rev. Fr. Michel Najim, President of AHOS, and Fr. Fadi Rabbat, Academic Dean, who reminded participants that their time at the

Residency was not only an academic undertaking but also a sacred pilgrimage of transformation. Students were exhorted to engage their studies with both intellect and heart, allowing the encounter with the living tradition of the Church to shape their ministry and witness.



(The full opening remarks are reproduced in **Appendix A.**)

## Liturgical Services

The first weekend was marked by prayer and worship, with Vespers on Saturday evening and the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, presided by Bishop Theodore Ghandour and concelebrated with Archimandrite Fady Rabbat, Fr. Elias Boulos, Fr. Roman Kohen, Fr. Juvenaly Hale, Dn. John Bean, and Dn. Justin Omsted. These services set the tone of the Residency, grounding all academic and communal life in the rhythm of the Church's liturgy.



## Academic Engagement & Formation



Throughout the week, students from all programs — MTS, SSC, MDiv, and PDd — engaged in classes covering Church History I, Spiritual Father, Fundamentals of Theology, and other subjects taught by AHOS faculty and enriched by the wisdom of Bishop Thomas. The classrooms became places of both rigorous intellectual exploration and



deep spiritual reflection, as faculty and students entered into the living dialogue of the Church's theological tradition.

## Graduation Ceremony



Another highlight of the first week was the Graduation Ceremony on August 25, during which AHOS celebrated the accomplishments of students completing their programs. Faculty, family, and fellow students gathered to honor the graduates, giving thanks for their perseverance and commitment to theological study and ministry. The ceremony was a

moment of joy for the whole AHOS community, as the Church received new laborers prepared for service in Christ's vineyard.

The week concluded with the AHOS Faculty Meeting on August 30, where professors reflected on the progress of the programs, shared insights from their teaching, and planned for the future of AHOS. These gatherings reaffirmed the collaborative spirit that sustains AHOS as a community of learning and faith.



## Faculty Meeting

On August 30, the week closed with a faculty meeting. Professors reflected on the progress of the Residency, shared pedagogical insights, and planned for future development of AHOS programs. This meeting affirmed the collaborative ethos that undergirds AHOS as a community of learning and faith.



## Week Two: Deepening Study and Fellowship

### Orientation & Opening Remarks

The second week, spanning August 30 to September 6, commenced on September 1 with orientation sessions. These were led by Fr. Michel Najim, Fr. Fadi Rabbat, Fr. Elias Boulos, and other faculty. With help from Bishop Theodore Ghandour, these sessions welcomed students into the rhythm of the second week, encouraging continuity in the spirit of community and commitment.



At the opening, Fr. Michel Najim delivered a speech reminding students of their vocation modeled on St. Symeon the New Theologian, emphasizing humility, spiritual transformation, and the servant's heart. (Full text in **Appendix C.**)





## Academic, Liturgical, and Pastoral Life

On September 2, students attended intensive class sessions across programs, with faculty guiding them in advanced topics in Church History, Spiritual Fatherhood, theology, and pastoral studies.

On September 3, the day began with faculty reflection and communal Vespers. That evening, Bishop

Theodore met personally with students, offering counsel, encouragement, and pastoral reflections. The evening concluded with fellowship in the Village lobby, where old and new friendships were renewed.

September 4 featured a Divine Liturgy led by Archimandrite Seraphim Daoud, assisted by AHOS priests and student deacons—reinforcing that all learning is rooted in Eucharistic life. Later that day, Emily Yocum (Executive Director of Orthodox for Life) delivered two sessions on the sanctity of life and Orthodox witness. These lectures bridged



theology and real-world ministry, equipping students to defend life with clarity and compassion. Simultaneously, MDiv students took part in practical training sessions.

On September 5, there was a professional liturgical training workshop for clergy led by Archimandrite Seraphim Daoud. The session focused on the beauty, order, and pastoral depth of Orthodox worship, equipping clergy and future clergy with liturgical tools for faithful service.

## Highlights & Community Life

Throughout the week, the theme was integration: academic rigor, spiritual depth, and communal life intertwined. Students and faculty shared meals, prayer, conversation, and fellowship that strengthened the bonds of the AHOS family. The second week's experiences were recounted in the AHOS blog, highlighting key sessions, liturgies, and the pastoral dimension of the program.

## Conclusion: A Time of Grace, Learning, and Communion

Over the two weeks, the AHOS Residency embodied a living vision of theological formation grounded in worship, tradition, and community. Students and faculty prayed together, studied deeply, and shared fellowship, sustaining one another in the life of the Church.

With the blessing of Metropolitan Saba, the guidance of bishops, and the dedication of faculty, the 2025 Residency reaffirmed AHOS's mission: to form faithful clergy and laity through rigorous theological education and spiritual formation in the Orthodox tradition.

As participants now return to their parishes, ministries, and roles, they carry forward the vision of AHOS: to serve Christ's Church with humility, insight, and love.





# Appendices

## Appendix A: Opening Remarks at the 2025 Residency – Week One

**Fr Michel Najim – AHOS President**

Dear students, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Welcome to the dawn of a new academic year—an auspicious threshold in the unfolding of your sacred pilgrimage: the pursuit of divine knowledge and the transformation of your soul into the ineffable likeness of God. Whether you return once more to the blessed grounds of the Antiochian Village or cross its threshold for the first time, know with certainty that your presence here is not incidental. It is a manifestation of divine providence—a thread in the tapestry of your salvation, woven by the hand of the Almighty.

How precious and joyful is this gathering under the auspices and blessings of our beloved Metropolitan Saba, and the guidance of His Grace Bishop Thomas our spiritual advisor! Before even a single step is taken on the path that lies before you, I greet you not merely as students, but as fellow pilgrims, as heirs of a venerable and sacred tradition. You are being summoned by God into a mystery—into the living stream of Holy Orthodoxy, flowing directly from the Fathers, those luminaries and pillars of the Church. Our school follows the definition of the eight ecumenical council: “We embrace with mind and tongue and declare to all people with a loud voice the definition of the most pure faith of the Christians which has come down even to us from the beginning through the Fathers, subtracting nothing, adding nothing, changing nothing, falsifying nothing.”

This is the teaching of the school, this is the teaching of the dean, this is the teaching of all your esteemed professors. I rejoice and thank God for them and for you. It is only fitting to acknowledge and honor in advance all of you who have been called to bear this sacred task and receive its surpassing dignity. I rejoice with solemnity and gladness in the honor that awaits you—an honor not temporal or symbolic but enduring and eternal.

All the professors and staff are ready to help you towards receiving the inheritance of the saints—the patristic treasury of divine wisdom. For what lies ahead is not the accumulation of human ideas or the repetition of theological formulas, but the reception of that which “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man”—those spiritual wonders God has prepared in abundance for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9).

What you will encounter is not the invention of professors, but the sacred and ineffable gift that has been passed down from generation to generation. The professors are here to initiate you into the mystery of purification, illumination, and ultimately, theosis.

Every lecture, every text, every prayer, is not merely a means of instruction, but an entrance into the mystery of the Word made flesh. True theological study is not the memorization of theories; it is the cultivation of a soul capable of discerning God’s presence in all things and of abiding in His uncreated light.

This is your calling: to take your studies seriously. For when you truly perceive what has been entrusted to us, gratitude ignites zeal, and zeal bears the fruit of transformation.

Let this, then, be your vision as you embark—or continue—on your theological journey to love God and His saints. Theology is not about theories—it is about Him. The Living God, who calls us not to ease but to glory through the Cross.

Therefore, with joy and holy fear, I welcome you on behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan Saba, the academic dean Father Fadi, and the director of residency Father Elias and all the professors the staff of both AHOS and the Antiochian Village, into this sacred place. I urge you to strive for excellence, but never apart from the humility that gives knowledge its light.

May the wisdom and power of our Crucified and Risen Lord guide your footsteps, illumine your minds, and enlarge your hearts. May this year be one of superabundant grace, spiritual deepening, and true communion with Him who has called you to this sacred path.

May it mark not merely a new beginning, but the beginning of your ascent into the Kingdom. And may you be strengthened in grace and truth to receive the glorious and ineffable gifts which await those who love Him.

Welcome, beloved brethren, to this sacred and transformative journey. May the grace of our Lord sustain you at every step.

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#### **Fr. Fadi Rabbat – Academic Dean**

AHOS ( The Antiochian House of Studies ) Residency Orientation Program 2025, Week One welcoming words by Fr. Fadi Rabbat

Your Grace Bishop Theodore, Patriarchal Vicar of Rio de Janeiro

Your Reverence Great Economos Fr. Michel, President of the Antiochian House of Studies,

Your Reverence Fr. Elias, Director of the Residency,

Dear Colleagues, Faculty, Staff, Students and members of our AHOS family,

As I speak to you today, I am moved by the sense of possibility that fills our house—the quiet confidence that comes from being part of a lineage that spans centuries and stretches into North America with a clear, hopeful purpose. I speak to you not as someone standing apart but as someone who has learned, through many seasons, that education is most powerful when it is lived in intimate companionship, when scholarly rigor is braided with prayer, and when our shared life becomes a witness to the Gospel in all its tenderness and challenge.

AHOS carries the ethos of the historical School of Antioch—the heart of a missionary tradition that has welcomed many languages, many cultures, and a vast diversity of gifts. This is not merely a banner we display; it is a living conviction that truth is better pursued together, across differences, with humility and courage. We are here to offer a distinctly Antiochian Eastern Orthodox Christian education that invites clergy, laity, and all seekers to experience the Orthodox way of life in a way that is deeply relational, profoundly rooted in worship, and boldly engaged with the world around us.

In the hours and days ahead, you will be asked to bring your whole self to this work: your questions, your longings, your stories, and your sincere desire to serve. Our curriculum is not a ledger of topics to check off; it is a path we walk together—learning how to think with sound doctrine, how to worship with integrity, how to act with compassion, and how to relate to one another with honesty and mercy. And because we hold the Apostolic Tradition as our compass, we strive to be faithful in word and deed, to bear witness to Christ's life in every corner of our day.

I want to offer three commitments that come from the core of who we are and what we hope to become, not as rules, but as invitations to transformation.

First, I commit to being a companion in your scholarly journey. I know the academic road can feel steep, and I also know its rewards are immense. Here, you will be invited into rigorous study, into questions that pierce the surface, and into conversations that test our assumptions with grace and patience. I pledge to meet you where you are, to challenge you with care, and to celebrate with you the moments of clarity and wonder that emerge when ideas illuminate life. Whether we gather in person or share space across a screen, may our minds be rigorous and our spirits generous.

Second, I commit to fostering your spiritual formation and your sense of belonging in the household of faith we call AHOS. The Orthodox way of life—worship, doctrine, action, and relationship—cannot be reduced to a set of practices or a checklist of duties. It is a way of being that shapes how we pray, how we treat one another, and how we respond to need in the world. In every discipline we pursue, may we listen for the movements of the Spirit, may we seek guidance from our spiritual directors, and may we cultivate a rhythm of personal devotion that sustains us and deepens our leadership as we serve others. In this house, even as we grow individually, we grow into a common life that nourishes, heals, and challenges us to witness with integrity.

Third, I commit to welcoming the fullness of our diversity and learning to carry the Gospel with humility and courage into every context we touch. Antioch teaches us that strength arises from the beauty of many voices and stories united in shared faith. Let us honor one another's backgrounds, listen with patience, and practice justice and mercy in our daily actions. We are called not to uniformity but to unity in mission—to bear light into the world through acts of hospitality, truth-telling, and service that reflect the heart of Christ.

As we continue our shared life, I invite you to entrust us and our community with your hopes and even your doubts. I invite you to lean into the times when our differences become occasions for deeper understanding, not division. I invite you to participate openly in the disciplines that help form character—the habits of study, of worship, and of service—that will sustain you long after any single course or assignment.

Welcome to AHOS. Welcome to your House. Welcome to a life of learning, prayer, and service that is bigger than any one of us, yet made whole by each one of us, abiding in Christ, abiding in truth, love, and service. Thank you, and may God bless our shared journey. Amen!



## Appendix B: 2025 Graduation Ceremony Coverage

### His Eminence Metropolitan SABA Speech

Your graces, brothers, Bishop Thomas and Bishop Theodore, my beloved all the Reverend Fathers, President, new teachers, fathers of the family of Elms, my beloved. When Father Michel talked with me about the commencement, I thought to myself, what should I write? Then, after I prayed, I didn't write. Why? Because I want to talk with you, but God inspires me. Of course, I put some points in my mind, but I don't want today to read; I want to talk with you. We are in an academic institute called AHOS, where we study theology. Theology is a science of God. When we say science, we mean it is a discipline through which we study—similar to psychology, biology, or zoology—but theology differs because we, as priests, as Christians, as teachers, need not only to know about God but to live with God. Why do we study about God? Do we study just to be teachers, to be professors, to know more? That is not bad, but as Christians, we should study theology because we want to know more about God to live with Him and to understand how to live with Him. Theology is not a desert; it is a science about God, about God's truth. Yet if one enters into the study of God without living in God's truth, exploring Him only through the mind, reason, or reading, theology remains at the level of the mind, at the level of the head. The danger is closing oneself within one's system, thinking that knowing much makes one great, but the more we know, the more responsible we are, and the more accountable we become.

God, in our Orthodox faith, is not the God of our theological constructs or systems. He is the Living God, a person who enters into relationship with those who cry out to Him sincerely, humbly, and constantly. By intellectualistic rhetoric or logical preaching, we often go over people's heads instead of offering a simple homily, like a mother's words to her child, which can be understood and expresses personal experience with God. In the Orthodox Church, we must critique ourselves. We know many beautiful things about God; we teach high theology, principles, and constants, which is fantastic, but what matters is living and experiencing God. There is often a gap between what we know, what we preach, and what we actually live. We talk about concepts, but not always how we embody them. Many people do not like to hear sermons because they are not rooted in lived experience. If God acts in our life, His work will be visible.

I remember after the election by the Holy Synod, I wrote letters to the Archdiocese, to priests and my brother bishops. Initially, people were shocked because I addressed them as "my sons." Where is our theology if we live with God yet cannot feel this presence? All knowledge without this awareness is meaningless. How do we live our Gospel? Studying and praying are essential, but we must also be men and women of prayer, living a life of prayer. Metropolitan Kalistos emphasized that studying theology should involve trust in research, writing, and teaching. Theology is a scholarly pursuit, requiring rigorous reasoning, but it is not detached like biology; personal commitment is vital. Vladimir Lossky also stressed the integral link between theology and spirituality, insisting that theology and prayer are inseparable. True theology, in his view, is ultimately mystical, and mysticism fulfills theory.

We must ask ourselves if we are ready to live as people of prayer, experiencing God in daily life. Quotations from Scripture, the Holy Fathers, or great theologians are helpful, but people are moved more by our lived experiences. Our experience with God should align with the teachings of the Church and Scripture. In America, people often speak of Holy Tradition, but not all can differentiate between unchanging Holy Tradition and local, temporal customs. We need people of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, to teach and bear

witness. My prayer is that we live according to our mystical teachings in the Orthodox Church, experiencing purification, illumination, and divinity. Now you graduate from the Antiochian House of Studies. You have studied, listened, and learned about Antioch. I want you to be true witnesses of the spirit of Antioch, not proud of it. People need to see Antioch's spirit through your honesty, purity, and goodness. Congratulations. God bless you. We are so proud of you.

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## **Fr Michel Najim Speech [AHOS President]**

### **Graduation Speech (2025)**

*Delivered at AHOS Commencement*

**Your Eminence, Your Grace, Dear graduates, esteemed faculty, beloved family, and all who gather with us today:**

Upon the invitation of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania, the relics of Saint John Chrysostom—his skull with the attached ear—were brought by Archimandrite Ephraim, Abbot of Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos, and placed in the Patriarchal Cathedral in Bucharest. From July 11 to 16, more than 60,000 faithful from across the country came to venerate Chrysostom's relics. According to clergy and local authorities, as many as 7,000 people approached the relics every four hours.

Abbot Ephraim bore the head of the founder of the School of Antioch—sanctified, luminous, and embodying one of the finest expressions of theology. In the Antiochian house of study, you are blessed by his teaching and by the witness of all like-minded Fathers throughout the history of Christianity.

**Dear graduates,** today marks a sacred moment—a consecrated beginning. You stand at the threshold of an uncharted future, carrying within you the mind of the Fathers. You bear the imprint of formation in the Patristic tradition—a tradition not of mere information, but of interior transformation and divine transfiguration.

You have not simply studied the fathers; you have, in some measure, internalized their witness. You have been blessed by the presence and blessings of his Eminence Metropolitan Saba, his Grace bishop Thomas, and his grace bishop Theodore and guided by wise and faithful professors—not only through their teachings, but more profoundly through proclaiming the mind of the Fathers. Through them, you have been shaped into seekers of sanctity and holiness.

Yet as you graduate, you step into a secular landscape that offers ease without depth, opinions divorced from truth, and gratification stripped of enduring meaning. You live in an age that is often content with a “Christ” of sentimentality but forgets the Christ whom Chrysostom proclaimed—the Physician of our souls and bodies, whose wounds heal and whose light transfigures.

Orthodox Christianity is not an ideology. It is the healing of the human person—the purification of the heart, the renewal of the mind, and the union of man with the uncreated energies of the Triune God. Holiness, in the Orthodox tradition, reveals that genuine life is found in sacrificial love.

Forget not: the holy person is often persecuted, as Chrysostom was—not only by the secular society, but also by distorted forms of religiosity, by the idolatries of political religion and the politics of religion alike.

Beloved graduates, your vocation is to become like-minded with John Chrysostom the head of the Antiochian School—not to be engineers of spiritual content or marketers of theological language, but to be priests, deacons, theologians and teachers—whole, transfigured, radiant with the likeness of Christ. You are called to be bearers of the divine mind—not as theorists, but as witnesses and living icons of the Kingdom of God.

John Chrysostom reposed in the year 407, and now after 1,618 years his relics remain a great blessing to myriads of people. You are blessed and fortified with the wisdom of Saint Chrysostom, the head of our school. You are sent to proclaim that man is fashioned for communion with God, not through ideological systems, but through the grace of divine energy and uncreated love.

Let us then become persons of flame—kindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, courageous enough to love deeply, to suffer for Christ’s sake, and to live truthfully. And know this: you are not alone. Christ is within you, He who descends into our brokenness and confusion, and who calls each of us into the fullness of life.

The Holy Spirit accompanies you as Comforter and Sanctifier—the power who fills, heals, and hallows your every step.

Go forth, then, with the mind of John Chrysostom and with his sacrificial love. And may your life bear luminous witness to the truth that alone makes people holy through your ministry.

Congratulations—and may the blessing of the Lord be upon you always.

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### **Fr Fadi Rabbat speech [AHOS Academic Dean]**

Your Eminence Metropolitan Saba, Your Graces Bishop Thomas and Bishop Theodore, Your Reverence, Fr. Michel Najim, AHOS President, Beloved Concelebrants and Brothers, Professors, and Faculty, Dears in Christ, We stand at the threshold of a turning point—entrusted with a sacred lineage, welcomed into the Antiochian House of Studies, and invited to carry forward a radiant witness from this hall to the world. Today, St. Peter—the chief of the Apostles and founder of our Antiochian Church—reminds us that, like living stones, we have been built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But what is a spiritual house, and how are we formed into a holy priesthood, offering sacrifices pleasing to God through Christ? The answer is simple, yet profound: *oikos pneumatikos* — οἶκος πνευματικός — “house of the Spirit.” It denotes any habitation of God in the Spirit, where His glory dwells and His power and grace are made manifest (Ephesians 2:22). It encompasses the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, saturated by the Spirit and Power of God (1 Peter 2:5); the saints, the “household of God” (Ephesians 2:19); and, most intimately, our bodies, declared as “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). In this living order, we are rocks upon which the praises of Him who called us out of darkness shall be proclaimed (1 Peter 2:9). This is the very heart of the priesthood: to render to God the sacrifice of praise, the offering of worship—the core of human existence. From the dawn of creation, we were made to be priests and kings, bearing dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). The vocation of priesthood is defined in



Hebrews: “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices” (Hebrews 8:3). And so we offer, with every breath, the perpetual sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving and gratefulness: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15). The word Eucharist comes from the Greek term “*efkharisto*” (Εὐχαριστώ), which means “thank you”. We celebrated the Divine Liturgy to express our gratitude. A priest’s work is to make offerings to God with gratefulness. A sacrifice and an offering are one: the primary act is the surrender of all things to God, through Christ—the recognition that everything we have and are belongs to Him. This is the very center of our communion with God. In the Divine Liturgy the priest declares “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all”. God is the source and owner of all gifts. We participate by offering back to God what he has entrusted to us. We offer what has been entrusted to us (gifts, prayers and the Eucharistic elements) in worship. Our priesthood remains holy as we remain in Christ and abide in His word, becoming a holy nation and His true disciples. Jesus declares: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (John 8:31). Merely memorizing, learning, or hearing the words of an AHOS teacher does not make one a disciple. One must be rooted in the teaching received, allowing the words of God to become one’s own words. The psalmist speaks with a heart burning for truth: “How sweet are Your teachings to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103). To live in Christ is to translate the teacher’s words into a life of transformation— “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Remain in Him by abiding in LOVE—for God is love, and He acts in love. Our Lord gave us a vivid, practical sign: “...love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). How did He love us? He loved us to the point of death, “even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8). Be ready to love your brother in the same way, to bear your cross for him, to crucify your ego before him, for the cross reveals the infinite love of God for us. Be ready to lay down your life for your friends, as our Lord teaches: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Beloved graduates, be a holy nation. Go in peace, become real priests, and make disciples not of yourselves but of Jesus Christ, teaching all that He commanded His Holy Apostles. Share with your neighbors the reservoir of God’s work within you—the experience of His love and the service it inspires. Love is service; the priesthood is service. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Servant. We have walked with you in love and service to teach that Love is service, that Love is humility. Remember the Lord’s example at the Last Supper: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15). Teach the Word of Him whom our High Priest served and loved us first. Yes, God loved us first and loved His Church first. As Scripture declares, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Carry forward with you the knowledge you have received, and especially the memories you have shared with us. Know that the Antiochian House of Studies will always be your home—a house of your fathers and brothers who will greet you with enduring love and care. I do not say goodbye, but until we meet again: see you soon. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Congratulations!

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**Deacon John Bean [Class of 2025 Representative]**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.**

Heartfelt Greetings to your Eminence, Metropolitan Saba and to their Graces, Bishop Thomas and Bishop Theodore and all the reverend clergy and laity gathered here today.

To the Master of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies and the Saint Stephen's Course graduating class of 2025: Thank you all for your mutual support as we made this journey together.

Indeed, all of us are thankful to the dear ones in our lives who supported us in manifold ways as we served in our local parishes in our practicums and diligently attended to our studies.

We thank all the faculty and staff of the Antiochian House of Studies who taught us and enriched us toward the ministry God calls us to.

We are thankful for the Antiochian Village staff for hosting us and for their loving hospitality.

Thank God for this institution that makes sound education in Applied Orthodox Theology in the Ethos of the Venerable Church of Antioch accessible to us where we are.

As I contemplated what to share with you today, The Lord placed in my heart, Saint Paul's words found in the first chapter of the book of Philippians.

In this letter he thanks the Phillipians for their partnership with him in the furtherance of the gospel. He is confident that God will perfect his work among them till the day of Jesus Christ. In his opening remarks of this letter, He prays a very fervent prayer for them that I would like to read to you. To me, it sums up the very purpose of the Antiochian House of Studies.

Saint Paul Writes:

**8For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. 9And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; 10so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; 11being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1: 1-11 Revised Version).**

Saint Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians: **"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" ( 2 Corinthians 4:6).** This is a great testament to his humility when he, first and foremost, self-identifies as a Servant of Jesus Christ and servant of God's people, for his sake.

It is also a testament to St. Paul's humility that he writes the Book of Philippians as being from himself and his spiritual child Timothy as a unit. Later in the same book, he refers to Timothy as having served "like a son with a Father in the Gospel". St Timothy, being a spiritual son to the Apostle Paul, becomes as an outgrowth of this experience, a spiritual father to others. The experience of being a good spiritual child is necessary for our maturity and our humility that we may be a vessel useful to God.

St Paul, enjoins all Christians to follow this example of the Phillipians, in unwavering communion in the work of the Gospel, when he writes in the Book of Hebrews: **“Remember those who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God. Follow their faith, considering the outcome of their manner of living. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (Hebrews 13:7).**

Saint Paul is worthy of this remembrance himself, for he holds his people in his heart prayerfully with the tender mercies and compassions of Jesus Christ. We are also called to this too. This requires our co-operation with God in spiritual formation.

To accomplish this spiritual formation means bringing forth the divine virtues in our lives, through prayer, spiritual reading, holy associations with fellow Orthodox Christians, ascetical struggle and the liturgical and sacramental life, that souls seeking God will be drawn to this healing grace found in the hospital of the Church.

It is Lord Jesus Christ who produces the fruits of righteousness in us. Without Him, we can do nothing. He holds primacy in all things. As Saint Paul wrote to the Colossians,

**“..[Y]ou have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:9b-11 NKJV).**

Sayidna Saba emphasizes that this Christ-centeredness is the ethos of our Church!

Likewise, what we are taught here at AHOS is not speculative theological philosophy but the revealed faith of Christ. It is applied theology overflowing with discerning love. It is therapeutic theology, borne not only out of books but also out of real empirical spiritual experience and truly knowing Christ with the goal of bearing Christ within ourselves and bringing him to others.<sup>[1]</sup> This is the Theology of the Saints and Holy Fathers, handed on to us, which is interpreted not in a wooden way but in accordance with the intention and context, as it applies to our times and circumstances<sup>[2]</sup>.

This theology serves a salvific purpose. That is what he says next that we **may be “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”**

True therapeutic Orthodox theology is ALWAYS doxological. Our theology is glorification of God the Holy Trinity in the Spirit and Truth. It is right-worship of the one true and living God.

Saint Paul says in Romans 5 that this love, which compels us, is not fallen love, but love from God the Holy Spirit. He writes: : ... **God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”**. This synergy will cause our theology to have warmth and effectiveness. We must strive for the inner kingdom of God ourselves and guide others toward the Kingdom because we truly care for them.

It is the high calling of all of us to carry ourselves in the Ethos of Christ. Saint Paul says, **For we are not peddlers of God’s word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence (2 Corinthians 2:14-17 NRSV89).**



For those from this class of 2025 who may one day be priests, my words today are reminders that the holy Ethos of the Orthodox Priest and Spiritual Father must be lived out with steadfastness. Priests must carry themselves in the fear of God, with faith, with love and with humility, to be an honor to Jesus Christ in the healing ministry of the Church.

In conclusion, May we all be spiritually fragrant vessels of the Holy Spirit, being increasingly conformed to the image of Christ, by applying what we have learned here at AHOS, whether clergy or laity, regardless of the assignments we are given, through the prayers of all the Saints. May this attract many sincere God-seekers to the “beauty of God’s house, the place where his glory dwells.”

I will end with the inspiring words of Saint Paul to hold unceasingly in our memory: **“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. [14](#)Let all *that you do* be done with love” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NKJV)**

Last of all, To all the graduating classes: Master of Theological Studies, Saint Stephen’s Course and the Master of Divinity Class of 2025! Congratulations! We made it! Glory to God!

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[\[1\]](#) I gratefully acknowledge the Godly and patristic writings of His Eminence Metropolitan Heirotheos Vlachos and the Late Father John Romanides (of blessed memory) who have influenced my thoughts on this topic.

[\[2\]](#) I gratefully acknowledge the wise teachings of Metropolitan Saba Esper who emphasizes this point in his words given at Antiochian House of Studies residency August 2025.

## Appendix C. Full List of Graduates

### *Master of Divinity (MDiv)*

Hany Adeeb Fawzy Bakhet	Hussam Ibrahim
Dn. John Bean	Fr. Nicholas Newman
Matthew Breen Benefield	Ryan Stephen Scannell
Matthew Gordon Bianco	Jonathan B.Skowron
Magdy Elkedwani	Katrin Venter
Saba F. Fattaleh	Christian Dion Wolfe
Lewis Abraham Fisher	

### ***Master of Theological Studies (MTS)***

Deborah Abdo-Dambrosio	Maksim Damljanovic	Darren Matthew Faber
Irene Aviles	Elissa Bjeletich Davis	Karen Sibert Haddy
James Berg	Justin Allen Davis	Joshua Daniel Mattson
Alec M. Bianco	James Matthew DuBois	Steve R. Parsons
Jeremy Markus Brinkerhoff	Hadi El-Farr	Joseph G.W. (Tripp) Prince III
Jeremy Conrad		Sherine Milad Yacoub

### ***St. Stephen's Certificate in Applied Orthodox Theology***

Matthew D. Berry	Nader Haddad	Thomas Andrew Przybyla
Joseph Bradley	Seth Owen Hart (Reader Seraphim)	Brian Robertson
Emanuel Burke	Dimitri Michael Kupanoff	Bradley J. Shaffer
Gareth Boyd	Theron Mathis	Subdeacon Luke Stevens
James (Derek) Cory	Deacon Mark Naftel	Gary Wilde
Santiago Garcia	Scott Michael Newton	Seth Williams
Johann Irle Gascoigne	Gresham Leo Olson	John Zastany
Sbdn Owen Godbold	Kip Shannon Perkins	Michael (Ephraim) Ziegler
	Tyler W. Phass	

## Appendix D: Opening Remarks at the 2025 Residency – Week Two

### Residency Second week speech – Fr Michel Najim [AHOS President]

**Beloved AHOS students,**

Today I wish to address the very heart of your sacred vocation—whether you are called to the office of subdeacon, deacon, priest, lay minister, educator, professor, Sunday school teacher, chaplain, chanter, or iconographer—through the illuminating example of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, a man who attained the profoundest humility and transcendent holiness.

Though filled with divine grace, Symeon avoided all human praises and admiration. Indeed, he deliberately sought to conceal himself from the fleeting praises of men, fully aware that the essence of true vocation transcends human honor and lies in becoming a living servant before God and His holy people.

When questioned about the character befitting a servant of God, Symeon sighed with the weight of solemn responsibility, confessing with openness and humility that even he felt unworthy of the immense dignity inherent in any church office, and especially to the priest—a dignity so august that it demands approach with trembling and contrite hearts.

Yet from his profound experience and spiritual insight, he imparted indispensable wisdom: the one who embraces the priestly calling must ardently pursue purification—not merely of the body but, more importantly, of the soul. The priest must cultivate humility in outward conduct and contrition within the depths of his heart. Standing before the altar, such a priest perceives not only the gifts laid before him but, through the eyes of faith, the invisible and ineffable presence of God dwelling within the sacred mysteries.

This clarity of heart and mind is indispensable for the priest to address God boldly and intimately—as one friend speaks to another—uttering the sacred invocation, *“Our Father who art in heaven,”* with the profound awareness that the true God, the Son by nature, dwells within him through the Holy Spirit.

However, Symeon solemnly warned—and his warning must resonate within us—that this sublime mystery of priesthood evokes awe even among the angels. No one should seek this calling prematurely or without worthiness. Instead, every seminarian, student of theology, and every deacon or priest must labor tirelessly in changing his mind daily, steadfastly keeping Christ’s commandments. Only through such continual spiritual change of the noetic faculty can one offer prayers and supplications and serve the people truly pleasing to God.

Saint Symeon himself was so filled with this Spirit that when celebrating the liturgy, his countenance radiated a celestial light, akin to that of an angel. Witnesses beheld a brilliance so intense it was almost unbearable to human eyes—a visible testament to the grace of God that illumined and transformed him from within.

I will read for you a paragraph from Nikitas Stithatos who wrote the life of Saint Symeon the new theologian. He said: “Symeon of Ephesus, who had also been the man’s disciple, would say, when he was telling people stories about him, “When I was concelebrating with the saint, my intellectual eyes were opened and I saw him, at the moment when he was celebrating the liturgy in the sanctuary, with an **omophorion** and wearing a patriarch’s stole, engrossed in the divine mysteries.” And Meletios, who was tonsured at his hands,



confirmed to me that “we would often see a luminous cloud completely enveloping him when he was standing in the sanctuary at the time of the holy eucharistic prayer.” And rightly so, for ***those who become eminent for reaching the summit of the virtues are also worthy of the glory of God.***”

Dear AHOS students, this is the vocation that awaits you: not a path to earthly glory, but a pilgrimage of profound humility, ceaseless change of mind, and reverent fear of God. It is a summons to become living temples of the Spirit, to offer the mysteries of Christ with pure hearts, and to enter into an intimate friendship with God Himself.

May you receive these words deeply and commit yourselves daily to spiritual preparation, so that when the moment arrives, you may stand before the altar as genuine servants of Christ—radiant with His grace and wholly dedicated in humble worship.

May God abundantly bless your journey and fill you with His Spirit, now and forevermore.

Amen.

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Full Details are on AHOS website: <https://ahos.edu/>

### Resources

- [The Antiochian House of Studies Concludes its 2025 Residency at Antiochian Village - Antiochian House of Studies | AHOS](#)
- [Opening Remarks at the 2025 Residency – week one](#)
- [2025 Graduation Ceremony Coverage](#)
- [Opening Remarks at the 2025 Residency – Week two](#)
- [Highlights from the Second Week of the AHOS Residency 2025 – Antiochian House of Studies | AHOS](#)

