



**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2023**  
**How Our Archdiocese Serves Us: Liturgics**  
From the Department of Communications

*Thanks be to God, the Antiochian Archdiocese has 36 departments and organizations – and their committees – comprised of dedicated clergy and laity who serve at the parish, diocesan and Archdiocesan levels.*

*But perhaps we don't know enough about Homeschooling, Lay Ministry, Sacred Music, Conventions and Conference Planning, Capital Improvement, and more, and how each of them work to strengthen the body of Christ.*

*The Department of Communications is pleased to present a new series: "How Our Archdiocese Serves Us." We'll get to meet and know the people who comprise these groups, their current functions and future plans, their successes, and how we can get involved.*

**Department of Liturgics**

Interview with Archpriest Thomas Zain, Chairman

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**Webpages for the Department**

[Liturgics webpage](#)

[Service books](#)

[Online Liturgical Guide](#)

Deacon Peter Samore

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**Tell us a bit about your personal history with the Archdiocese.**

I was born in Grand Rapids, Mich. and raised as a son of this archdiocese, having been baptized by the late, great Protosyngellos Ellis Khouri of blessed memory. I was reared in the



faith by Archpriest George Alberts, my childhood priest at St. Nicholas Church in Grand Rapids. I was active in Teen SOYO and SOYO/Fellowship of St. John the Divine on the local and “regional” levels (as it was known in those days). I also attended the Antiochian Village Camp as a camper during its first years.



After graduating Michigan State University with degrees in Russian language and marketing, I worked for one year before heading off to St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. During that time, I met my future Khourieh, Claudia, while serving my current parish of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn as a seminarian. I also studied at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology for one year, followed by one year of post-graduate studies at the St. John of

Damascus Institute of Theology in Balamand, Lebanon. Learning different traditions and backgrounds at these institutions would prove to be invaluable for my current work in Liturgics and in the Department of Inter-Orthodox and Inter-faith Relations which I also chair.

Following seminary and my marriage in 1994, I was ordained a deacon by Metropolitan Philip and a priest by Bishop Basil, and assigned as pastor of St. Mary Church in Wilkes-Barre, Penn. In 1997, I was transferred to St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn to serve as dean and to begin helping in the Archdiocese Headquarters in Englewood, N.J. on a part-time basis. I started as the secretary for Bishop Antoun and worked on some projects for Metropolitan Philip. In 2012, I was appointed as Vicar General after Archimandrite Elias Bitar retired from active ministry. I was appointed chairman of Liturgics in 2014 by Metropolitan Joseph.

**Why is your department so important to the parishes, clergy and laity of the Archdiocese?**

As Orthodox Christians, our primary function is to worship God. Everything we do individually and collectively stems from that. Liturgics ensures that our parishes – clergy and laity – can worship according to the rich Tradition of Orthodoxy, following the practices of our historic Patriarchate of Antioch.



Our divine services contain the theology of the Church. When we worship, we come to know God in Trinity, the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and all the saints who have been revealed to us throughout history and to the present day. When we worship, we commune with all of them. There is a saying in liturgical theology, “*Lex orandi, lex credendi,*” that is, “what we pray is what we believe.” Our rich hymns and worship express this reality more than any theological book we can read.



The department provides the materials and resources to guide our parishes in worship every Sunday and throughout the year. They get all the readings and texts – oftentimes accompanied by matching music – in the divine services that Liturgics produces on a constant basis. For example, the Divine Liturgy Variables (hymns and readings of the day) go straight into your parish’s bulletin.

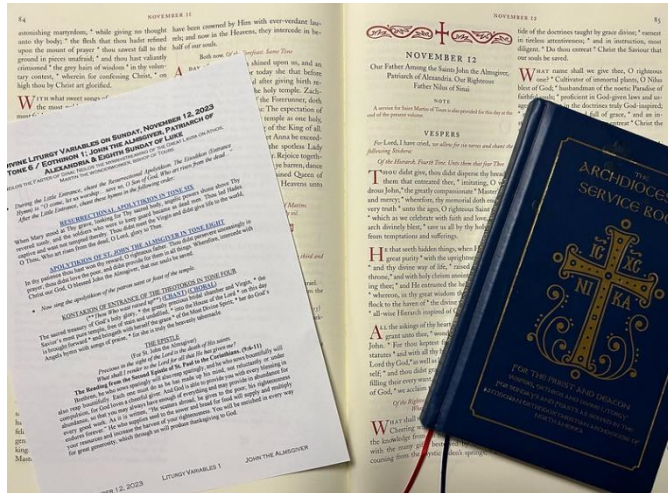
**How has your department evolved since its inception to present day? Have you added new technologies and programs over the years?**

Decades ago, under Metropolitan Antony Bashir of thrice-blessed memory, Liturgics was one of the first departments created in our Archdiocese. It has been responsible for the publication of service books both for the clergy and for the laity. The Archdiocese still sells some of the first Orthodox service books in the English language, like the ones produced by [Ms. Isabel Haggood](#) in 1905 and [Fr. Seraphim Nassar](#) in 1938. While these “old” books are no longer in use liturgically, they serve as important reference books linking us with our Archdiocese’s history in the new world.

In 2014, Liturgics debuted the Online Liturgical Guide (OLG). This webpage provides all of the liturgical texts for our churches that they use for weekends, great feasts, patron saints days, Great Lent, the Dormition Fast (including Paraklesis), and much more. The faithful can download these texts before coming to church, either printing them or putting them on their tablets, so they can follow along.



As the OLG adds more services in English, it adds more bilingual services (English and Arabic) to accommodate the number of immigrants arriving on our shores. Plus, since the OLG is online, archdioceses throughout our Patriarchate use these liturgical texts. Liturgics receives emails from parishes in Australia and Great Britain.



In the past two years, the department produced the fourth edition of [The Liturgikon](#), the first edition of [The Archdiocesan Service Book](#), and the long-awaited second edition of [A Pocket Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians](#) – which is already being reprinted after selling out in record time! These publications have corrected longstanding errors, guided our clergy to offer the divine services according to Antiochian tradition under the direction of our Metropolitan, standardized the

Archdiocese’s English translation of the Divine Liturgy, and given our faithful more prayers to beseech God’s help.

**How many people are working in your department or organization, and what are their roles?**

Deacon Peter Samore coordinates most of the work for the department and directs the OLG. He produces the English services with help from a review team consisting of Fr. Patrick O’Grady, Dr. Sam Cohlma and me. Deacon Peter also oversees the team that produces and reviews the bilingual services: Kh. Ramia Issa, Fr. Elie and Kh. Rouba Estephan, and Mr. Chadi Karam. They type Arabic and fix grammatical errors.

Fr. Raphael Daly and Fr. Peter Cox typeset all the service books which Fr. Jeremy Davis and, ultimately, His Eminence Metropolitan Saba thoroughly review before publication. They ensure the Archdiocese’s standardized translations are consistent throughout current and future publications. Fr. Samer Youssef and Dn. John Dibs submitted their work on the forthcoming bilingual pew liturgy book which we will adopt for use in the Archdiocese.



Liturgics has a great partnership with the Department of Sacred Music. The chairwoman, Mrs. Mareena Boosamara Ball, ensures that new music compositions use the same standardized translations. So does Mr. Christopher Holwey, who tirelessly typesets music for the divine services that our department produces. Links to the PDF music files are embedded in all the liturgical texts so choirs and chanters can find them easily.

This large collaboration reduces confusion and errors, improving worship in our churches where our clergy and faithful can focus on encountering God.

### **What are your department's primary objectives and vision for the next two years?**

Final preparations are being made for a new divine liturgy book for the pew in English-only and English-Arabic formats. The department has also begun typesetting the fourth edition of *The Services of Great and Holy Week and Pascha*. This book will correct errors and inconsistencies, and use the stronger translation of hymnography from The Holy Transfiguration Monastery of Brookline, Mass. This will form the basis of new music for Holy Week. Work has also begun on a new edition of *The Divine and Holy Gospel Book*. Typesetting and reviewing are laborious, and printing could take up to eight months for hardcover books. So please pray for us and give us your patience as many of the older books we need to reprint were never typeset on a computer!



### **Tell us about a recent success story.**

Thanks be to God, as our parishes use the wealth of divine services available at the OLG, they are inspired to offer more divine services. The department knows more and more of our churches celebrate weekday Orthros and Vespers and, as resources and time allow, we intend to provide additional weekday

services to meet those ever-increasing needs. We have started by offering Vespers every Wednesday night. It is a tremendous blessing when parishes ask Liturgics for more and more services.

### **How has your department been meaningful to you personally and improved your life in Christ?**

Of all the “hats” I wear in the Archdiocese, this is the one that gives me the most joy as I have always loved liturgics and liturgizing. I still remember buying my first Nasser “five pounder” at a parish life conference when I was about 12 years old and, subsequently,

trying to purchase every liturgical book I could find! As such, learning and praying the beautiful services of the Church kept me close to God through my teenage and college years and, ultimately, led me to answer the call to serve Christ and His Church as my priestly vocation.

**How do people get involved in the work of your department? What kinds of expertise do you need from them?**

Most of all, we need people to help with typesetting and graphic design for our future service books. We were blessed for many years to have Fr. John Winfrey work in the department until his untimely and sudden death a few years ago. He was a professional typesetter with a unique expertise in typesetting liturgical books. Since that time, we have been blessed to have Fr. Raphael Daly pick up where he left off and now Fr. Peter Cox. However, to keep up with the demand for new books, we need more help in this area. People can contact Deacon Peter or me if they would like to offer their services and alert us to other liturgical needs in the churches.