



# HOLY ASSUMPTION MONASTERY

## NOVEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER



Dear Friends,

### ST NICHOLAS HOUSE UPDATE

There is a joke about a man who joins a monastic order in which you can only say two words every ten years. After his first ten years, he goes to his abbot and says "Food cold." After twenty years, he says, "Bed hard." After thirty years, he says, "I quit." The abbot replies, "I thought so. All you've done in thirty years is complain."

I have always found this joke funny, but - sadly - that's because I think the monk's words are reasonable. And that says something about me, doesn't it? If all I would have to say after ten years of silence is a complaint, then I wouldn't have been truly silent before God - I'd just have been hoarding up years of discontent.

Those of you who know us personally know that we certainly haven't taken vows of silence! Hopefully, though, we are trying to cultivate enough silence in our hearts that we can concentrate more on God and less on our complaints.

The most beautiful example I know of somebody who did that was a woman we knew in a nursing home. She had had a stroke that made her incapable of expressing her thought in words. There were two huge exceptions, though. The things she could ALWAYS say were "Wonderful!" and "Thank you." She took the silence that was imposed on her, put it deep into her heart, and made it a prayer of love and gratitude. God grant us to do likewise.

with love in Christ,  
Mother Melania and the sisters

St Nicholas House is going fast - so fast that it should be completed this spring, instead of this summer, as originally projected! This great news puts extra urgency to our fundraising efforts. We have raised over \$700,000 of the needed \$1,200,000 and are in the final stages of securing a \$400,000 loan.



*And that's a wrap!*

We are planning a matching campaign to coincide with Giving Tuesday (Nov 29) in order to raise the remaining \$100,000. Our goal is to have \$50k pledged as a challenge to raise an additional \$50k by December 31st. Due to the economic downturn, raising the \$50K challenge money has been more challenging than during previous fund drives. In recognition of the sacrifices our friends are making, we are putting in \$10,000 of our own savings for the challenge.

All this is to say a) we will definitely have a matching fund challenge for Giving Tuesday, b) we HOPE that it will be a \$50K challenge, c) whatever the result, we are deeply thankful to God and the beautiful friends He has given us for all the love and support you've given us over the years.

Please consider planning to participate in the upcoming fundraiser, which will kick off with Giving Tuesday on November 29th. We are currently accepting donations as part of the challenge grant (we still need about \$20k), and starting November 29th, we will be looking to match that grant, dollar-for-dollar!

### KIDS' BOOK CORNER

Mother Melania is working diligently (at least, that's what she says!) on the first issue of a kids' book newsletter and on several new series. First is *Best Buddies: What's In a Name?* - the story of a homeless man and the dog who befriends him.



### CALENDAR

SUNDAYS - Divine Liturgy, 10AM  
for other services, please see our website

### ZOOM RETREATS

November 12 - Mother Melania. **How Do You Love People You Don't Like?**  
December 10 - Fr Philip Halliwell. **Lessons from the Lives of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip**

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## OCTOBER ZOOM TALK

Our speaker for the October Zoom talk was Reader John Burnett, who directs the Africa Fund at St Nicholas Church in San Anselmo. From a young age, John sensed a call to work for the church in Africa. His desire never panned out until he was sent on an exploratory mission to Uganda 2003. He fell in love with the people there and returned in 2005 to become dean of the seminary in Kampala.



*John Burnett with Naamala Jessica and a favorite teacher in her last year of high school. Jessica now has a degree in Accounting, thanks to the Africa Fund.*

After 3 years, to his great sadness, internal diocesan changes ended his stint—but he knew he had to go back. A year and a half later he found himself in Johannesburg as dean of the seminary there, in one of Johannesburg’s slums. (A couple of his old South Africa friends were on the call!) But the seminary had attracted no students, and he found himself teaching Zimbabwean and Congolese refugees instead. Unfortunately, two years later, the new bishop closed the seminary, and John came back to America. He hopes to return to Africa, but presently is teaching online classes in Scripture.

While in Uganda, his stipend of \$900/month made him the richest man in town — but Uganda is so poor that there was nothing to spend money on, except people. And it wasn’t long before people were asking for help. A bit hesitant because he knew he’d be signing up to take him at least through high school— he first accepted to sponsor an orphaned 5th grader. Over time, more and more people came for help, and soon he’d reached the end of his \$900. At that point, he started asking friends to help, and that was how the Africa Fund got started. He told a variety of stories about the people he’s helped. So many of these people have graduated and gotten jobs and helped their own neighbors and relatives in turn! The Fund currently supports a medical student in Uganda, an orphanage of 16 people in Congo, and several dozen others.

John was deeply inspired by Mother Gaurilia (well-known due to the book *The Ascetic of Love*), who never said No to those in need, but always Yes, trusting Jesus, who said, “Give to everyone who asks” (Lk 6.30). Mother Gaurilia called this Love, but John says he’s come to understand the value of Community. Colonialism and poverty have destroyed all of Africa’s local cultures, leaving a billion individuals to grab and snatch and take advantage for themselves alone. In this environment, empowered by the selfless love of Christ, the Church can become a real antidote to the misery and exploitation of self-centeredness. But we have to discover this in practice.

John talked a little about the schisms that currently afflict the Orthodox Church in Africa. The Alexandria Patriarchate, mostly Greek, has had its hands full, serving the Greek diaspora, and has lacked adequate funds. When Constantinople and Moscow broke communion over the situation in Ukraine, the Russian Church withdrew its few churches in Africa from the Alexandrian Patriarchate and invited the Africans to join them. Up to 75% of the priests in some areas have done so, having long felt neglected by the Greek church. With friends on both sides, John feels that especially in this situation, we must find ways to build truly gospel-centered community.

God knows, things are not very different in America. Our divisions can be daunting, but we can reach out to one another, even just by chatting up the checkout lady at the supermarket, talking with a homeless person, or trying hard to hear each other in our parishes. We can always listen, and we can always help with the work! So let’s take confidence in God, who has desired from all eternity to build his Church—that Community that takes its origin in the Holy Trinity.

To learn more about the Africa Fund, especially to make a gift that will \*directly\* feed, house, educate, and provide health care for some of the most wonderful (and poorest) people on the planet, go to <https://stnicholasaficafund.org> and hit the red button!

<https://holyassumptionmonastery.com/october82022africafund>

## ZOO UPDATE - For the Birds



*I have a wish - please fill my dish!*



*The top of the cage is much nicer than the inside!*



*You check that side. I'll check this. Then make a break for it!*



*This is the best pic you get. We don't pose for paparazzi!*

## HERE & THERE



*Greek & Middle-East Food Fest, St. George Church, Rohnert Park, CA*



*Visit from members of St. Patrick Episcopal Church, Kenwood, CA*