

**"Let the little children
come to me..."**

St. Matthew 19:14

NOVEMBER 20th, 2022- ISSUE 5

STOCSS REFLECTIONS

***A Magazine of the St. Thomas Orthodox
Church, Toronto, Sunday School***



REFLECTIONS

MESSAGE FROM VICAR

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever." – (2 Peter 3:18)

Greetings! It's wonderful to address you all once again through our newsletter.

Hope you are all doing well and keeping in good cheer to welcome Christmas! It's a season of celebration with lots of food as well. We cook most of our Christmas dishes at home; children, however, may love food brought from outside including all sorts of snacks and "junk food".

Speaking of junk food – did you know some children *and* adults eat way too much junk food? Do you know what it does to our bodies? That's right, it makes them fat, sick or even diseased if we eat too much. We have to be careful about how much of this stuff we eat. The same is true about growing up spiritually. Sometimes as Christians, we eat way too much "spiritual junk food."

We may listen to messages and 'teachers' that are "easy" or we decide that we already know the truth and refuse to study God's word. We may also make excuses for our actions by keeping away from sacramental graces, such as Holy Qurbana by rationalizing God's Will and Word.

Just as there is a lot of different junk food, there is a lot of spiritual junk food too. Do you know what the result is? Sure you do: we become spiritually sick - or even spiritually diseased. The Bible tells us in 2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Growth requires obedience, discipline, and sincerely seeking God. Not "junk food."

"May your days be merry and bright at this Christmas season and throughout the New Year."

Love,
Thomas George Achen

MESSAGE FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Parents, Teachers and Sunday School Students,

Our Church year opens and our Church calendar begins with Koodosh Eetho. Koodosh means to consecrate or sanctify. Sanctification is the purification of the heart of a person—a dedication to God and an eradication of the sinful nature.

We are led to reflect on the sanctity and grandeur of the Church, which is the bride of Christ. Our Church fathers have arranged the Church Calendar so that we begin the new year of life in the Church with the sanctification.

The concept is to first sanctify and then dedicate the Church. Church does not mean the building but encompasses all the faithful. During this season of Koodosh Eetho to Christmas, the emphasis is on God's eternal covenant, renewal and sanctification of humanity.

During this time, we should attend worship regularly, participate in all spiritual activities and sanctify ourselves for the preparation of the Nativity of Christ.

Starting in January, we are planning to hold our Sunday school classes and events in-person. Come to church regularly and be blessed.



Wishing you all a merry and joyous Christmas season!

With Prayers,

Justin Alex

Principal, STOC Sunday School

(647)-345-6362

sundayschool@stthomasosc.org

SUNDAY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Academic Year 2022-2023

As we have been provided a new curriculum which will be shared amongst the American dioceses, we ask parents and students to continuously review the various resources provided on the following site <http://talmido.org/>.

Christmas Program

Our Church will be conducting a Christmas Program on 17th December. Our Sunday School students will be participating in various programs in the event. This program will be a good opportunity for everyone to celebrate and remember the Nativity of Christ.

Children's Forum

We will continue to have our Children's Forum throughout the year. We have completed our first forum of the year on November 8th, 2022 which was well attended. A few programs from the forum are available to view in our media gallery below.

Liturgical Song Training

We will continue to have our Liturgical Song Training sessions throughout the year. We thank our Choir Director Sujith Abraham and Sneha Varghese for their leadership during these sessions. All upcoming sessions will be advised via email closer to their planned dates.

Northeast American Diocese Talent Competition

Our Sunday School participated in the Northeast American Diocese Talent Competition in two categories. The Quiz competition occurred on October 22nd, 2022, and the Group song on November 19th, 2022. Our Group song submission can be viewed in the media gallery link provided below and the full video of all parish submissions can be viewed in the following link, <http://nesundayschool.org/mabartho-2022/>

Monastery Visiting

We are planning to visit St. Kosmas Monastery, Bolton in the spring of next year. It will be a one-day retreat in which we plan to bring both Sunday School and MGOCSM students. More details are to follow.

Lenten Retreats

This year we plan on conducting a Lenten Retreat for the Sunday School students. As we journey through the Lenten Season, the retreat will provide the students an opportunity to understand and reflect on the meaning of the Great Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. More details are to follow.

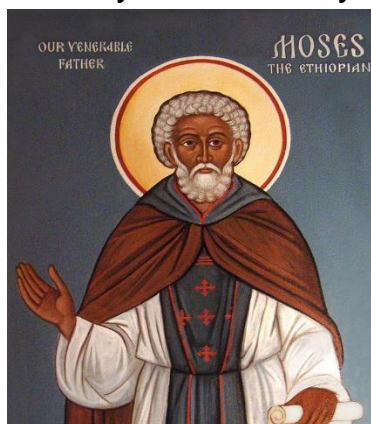
***We thank our students and parents for their continued support of our various Sunday School Activities. If there are any questions or concerns regarding any of the above-mentioned activities, please contact our Sunday School principal.**

ST. YELDO MAR BASELIOS

Every year on October 3rd, the Holy Church celebrates the feast of St. Yeldo Mar Baselios. Born near Mosul, St. Baselios joined the monastery of St. Behanon at a very young age and became a monk. He was later consecrated as a bishop and as the Catholicos of the East for the Syriac Orthodox Church. During a period when the Malankara church was under the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, he was commissioned to India at the age of 92. Through Portuguese Colonizers, the Roman Catholic Church tried to enforce Papal authority over Malankara. Bishops from Syria frequently came to confirm the tradition of Malankara, even though one had been killed. It was during this period, the St. Thomas Christians of Indian stood up to the Roman Catholic authorities. In 1653, nearly 25,000 Syrian Christians gathered at Mattancherry Church and held the rope tied around a leaning Cross. It was here the people confirmed their loyalty to the practices and traditions of the Orthodox Church, rejecting the authority of Rome. This event, known as the Coonan Cross Oath, is remembered on Jan 3rd every year. Despite this affirmation, the Portuguese repeatedly sought to suppress the Orthodox Church; bishops from Antioch continued to provide support to the faithful in Malankara.



In 1685, St. Baselios made his strenuous journey to India and reached Kothamangalam. During his short period in Malankara, he consecrated a monk to the episcopate with the name Mar Ivanios. While in India, he celebrated the local parish festival along with the Feast of the Cross on 14th September. Prior to his death, he told the faithful assembled that there would be a great sign of the Cross on the western side of the Church. At the time of his demise, the large granite cross on the western side of the church was lit up, just as St. Baselios foretold. Due to the toll of the journey which the elderly bishop endured to reach India, he passed away nearly three days after his arrival in 1685, and is buried at the Mar Thoman Church, Kothamangalam. This remains a major pilgrimage site for those seeking the intercession of St. Baselios. In 1947, H.H. Baselios Geevarghese II declared both St. Gregorios of Parumala and St. Baselios (Kothamangalam Bava) as saints of the Holy Church. May the prayers of St. Baselios be a stronghold for us always!



"All of us must be saints in this world. Holiness is a duty for you and me.

So let's be saints and so give glory to the Father."

-Mother Teresa

ST. GEEVARGHESE MAR GREGORIOS-MRS. SARAH JENNY OOMEN

On November 2nd the Holy Church celebrates the 120th memorial feast of St. Geevarghese Mar



Gregorios. St. Gregorios - or more commonly known as 'Parumala Thirumeni' - was the first declared saint of Malankara (Kerala, India). Born on June 15th, 1848 in Mulamthuruthy, Kerala, Thirumeni was the youngest of five children. From a young age, he led a very disciplined life of fasting and prayer, learning under the guidance of his relatives, who were of the 'Pallathattu Thanagattu' priestly family. At the age of 10, he was ordained a reader and a priest at the age of 18. Geevarghese would later be professed as a monk and at the young age of 28, he was consecrated as a bishop by H.H. Moran Mar Ignatius Peter IV, the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church. As the youngest bishop of the Church, the faithful affectionately called him 'Kochu Thirumeni'. Mar Gregorios was given charge of the Niranam Diocese and stayed at Parumala where a seminary and chapel

were eventually constructed. Many deacons joined Thirumeni in Parumala, where they received priestly training. Thirumeni would later establish and consecrate a church in the name of St. Peter and St. Paul (often referred to as Parumala Seminary), which has become one of the major pilgrimage sites of our Church. St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius (Vattasseril Thirumeni), one of Thirumeni's well known disciples, helped to establish the Catholicate as well as the 1934 Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. St Gregorios (along with other bishops) would also consecrate the martyr and undeclared saint of our Church bishop H.G. Julios Mar Alvares, who was previously a Roman Catholic Priest.

One of Thirumeni's greatest missionary visions for the Church was to help educate children in Kerala. He started schools in various regions such as Niranam, Thumpamon and Thiruvalla to provide primary and English education. He motivated the clergy to engage effectively in social outreach missions, particularly among the downtrodden of society. He often spoke against the caste system prevalent during his time, as he saw the value in all people. St. Gregorios, who suffered from his own health issues, strove to help the poor and needy especially during rampant small pox epidemics, specifically in the area of Thumpamon where many people were dying from this disease. His prayers (both in Christian and non-Christian homes) provided relief to their physical and mental distress. Even after his death on Nov. 2nd, 1902, many continued to seek the intercession of Parumala Thirumeni. He would later be declared a saint in 1947 along with St. Baselios Yeldo by his own disciple, H.H. Baselios Geevarghese II.

Jesus once said, "If we want to be great in the Kingdom of God, be a servant." Parumala Thirumeni always followed that. He served God's people without expecting anything in return. Since he had experienced the unconditional love of God, he shared that love with others. He reached out and touched the lives of many that were in need.

As we celebrate the feast of Saint Gregorios this month, may his life be an inspiration for all of us & encourage us to follow his exemplary qualities & spirituality. Let us supplicate him to intercede for us. May his prayers be a stronghold for us & lead us and our church to prosperity.

"Prayer is the inspiration of childhood, the refuge of youth and peace during old age."

-St. Gregorios of Parumala

H.G. ALVARES MAR YULIOS

Every year on September 23rd, the Holy Church celebrates the feast of H.G. Alvares Mar Yulios, a martyr and 'undeclared' saint. He was born on April 29nd, 1836 with the name Anthonio Francisco Xavier Alvares into a Catholic Family. He would later be ordained a priest and was eventually appointed as an Archbishop in Goa. Although he served the Roman Catholic Church, he disengaged with the Catholic Church's activities of interference in state administration along with their discouraging spiritual devotion. He was an outspoken freedom fighter of Goa, as he desired to remove foreign Portuguese oppression. Mar Alvares was a great scholar; he wrote several texts including: *The Universal Supremacy of the Church of Christ, Antioch and Rome*, along with periodicals such as *A Cruz (The Cross)* and *Vardade (Names of Goa)*. Since many of these works criticized the local government, the authorities banned their publication and circulation. As Goa was frequently impacted by epidemics such as malaria, small pox and cholera, Mar Alvares wrote texts on the treatment of such diseases. In 1871, he established a charitable organization to help the poor in different parts of Goa. He is often referred to as the Apostle of Charity for his various social endeavours to improve the lives of the impoverished. In his old age, he travelled in tattered clothes, going home to home asking for charitable donations for the needy.



As he was outspoken against the Roman Church and the Government, he was often mistreated in Goa, so he decided to settle in Brahmavar. It was during this period he became acquainted with the Malankara Orthodox Church, and in particular Parumala Thirumeni. As he became further engaged with the Orthodox Church, he was ex-communicated by the Catholic Church. St. Gregorios would later tonsure Mar Alvares into the monastic order and consecrate him as Metropolitan H.G. Alvares Mar Julios at Old Seminary, Kottayam. He later started a Brahamavar Mission to give spiritual direction and catechism for those newly joined members of the Orthodox Church. This Mission flourished, with its members eventually becoming a fully established diocese of our Church.



NEW APPOINTMENTS DIOCESAN METROPOLITANS



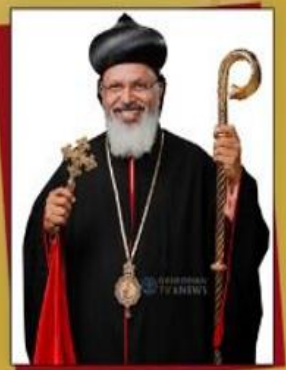
**H.G. Dr. Joseph Mar
Dionysius**
Metropolitan- Kollam



H.G. Abraham Mar Epiphanius
Metropolitan- Mavelikkara



**H.G. Dr. Mathews Mar
Thimothios**
Metropolitan- Chengannur



**H.G. Dr. Yuhannon Mar
Diascoros**
Metropolitan- Kottayam



**H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar
Yulios**
Metropolitan- Kunnamkulam



H.G. Abraham Mar Stephanos
Metropolitan- UK, Europe &
Africa



H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios
Metropolitan- South West
American Diocese



**H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar
Theolophilos**
Metropolitan- Ahmedabad



**H.G. Geevarghese Mar
Philaxenos**
Metropolitan- Madras



**H.G. Geevarghese Mar
Pachomios**
Metropolitan- Malabar



**H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar
Barnabas**
Metropolitan- Sulthan Bathery



H.G. Zachariah Mar Severios
Metropolitan- Idukki

7th MEMORIAL REV. FR. P.K. MATHEW-DR. C.J. KURIAN

On October 29th, our parish celebrated the 7th memorial feast of our founding Vicar, Rev. Fr. Dr. P.K. Mathew. The first Indian Orthodox Church in Toronto, the St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, was started by seven families. We had to bring a priest from the States because we had no priests here. As the Church grew, we had members from various denominations such as: the Syrian Orthodox, the Malankara Orthodox, Catholics, and the Knanaya Church.



After a few years, the general body of the Church decided to change policies regarding the issue of fund-raising. Four families disagreed with this change, decided to leave to form a new parish, and invited Rev. Fr. Mathew Parackel, who was working on his PhD at McGill University, to become our vicar. The families informed him that the new parish was formed because they did not want parishioners to be forced to pay membership, but for families to give as they were able. Mathew Achen said he would give his reply in a week's time. One week later, Achen called us, agreeing to become the Vicar of the St. Thomas Orthodox Syrian Church.

At that time, Achen could only come once a month to the Toronto church, as he had also agreed to conduct a monthly service in Ottawa and Kingston, in addition to the services which he led in Montreal. This would have entailed many sacrifices on the part of Achen and his family not only for the weekends away, but also for the loss of time in working on his studies and ministering to so many parishes. I am always grateful to Achen and all his family for the time, energy and service which they gave to so many. It was a joy for the entire parish whenever Achen and his family all came to Toronto. My family always loved having them to stay; my children very much enjoyed the extra time with Anu, Renu, and Sneha! The St. Thomas Church continued to have members from all Orthodox Church groups. Through Achen's leadership, our parish was the first to offer a weekend retreat here in Canada, which became an annual event. This blessed all of us spiritually and also helped affirm us as a community. After Achen received his Ph.D., he was called to serve in a Church in Nigeria for three years. Fr. Dr. Abraham Thomas, a Knanaya priest from Boston, agreed to come once a month so that Holy Qurbono could continue to be celebrated by our parish.

Father Mathew trained me to be an altar boy as soon as he joined; he also called Mr. Abraham (brother of Father Abraham Thomas) to serve. Under Achen's guidance, our church grew. We moved from Trinity College's chapel, where we had been holding our services, to renting a Church to accommodate the growing parish. Achen also planned for the future, inviting other priests to our church to ensure that church services continued to be offered without disruption after he retired.

Achen's guidance encouraged us to keep participating in our Church's practices - partaking of Holy Qurbono, Confession, Lenten observances, and daily disciplines. My daughter tells me that her Sunday School students speak of Achen, remembering him fondly and with great respect. He has had a lasting influence on generations. Father Mathew laid the foundation for the growth of the St. Thomas church. May our Lord richly reward him with a place in heaven and may his prayers help us to continue on the path of Christ.

***"Crowns are plaited, closely placed,
On the holy altar there;
Crowns will thus be set on heads
Of those priests who've served Thee well."***

PRAYER, AN ACTION WORD- DR. RAJAN GEORGE

Prayer, as we understand conventionally, can be classified under four categories:

1. **Petitionary:** Seeking material, health, and emotional things for us, our family, or friends.
2. **Liturgical:** Public worship.
3. **Ecstatic:** Thanking for the joy or gratifications of the mercies and blessings we have received.
4. **Contemplative:** This is the highest form of prayer, a pursuit to establish a spiritual connection with God. *

In this article, I am attempting to give an additional dimension to the above classification of prayer by bringing in an action-oriented perspective on how we practice prayer. In my opinion, making prayer a Petitionary, Liturgical, Ecstatic or Contemplative activity is not enough for us as practicing Christians. In a grammatical sense, prayer is not just a noun but an action-oriented word, a verb form too.

As an action-oriented word, we must be able to stand up for justice, for helping the ones in distress or who need some advice. We must utilize whatever capacities that God has blessed us with for the good of our family and people. Giving back to people in need is an action-oriented form of practicing prayer. In my opinion, prayer that does not lead to concrete action towards our brothers and sisters has no meaning. An action could also be in the form of love, non-judgemental acceptance of others as they are, serving the lesser privileged or those in distress. It is more valuable than asking for mercies and success for oneself or only being with people who are celebrating as against being available to those who are in distress. The ultimate form of an action prayer is to help people who are in no way connected with us in any form. This defines our character. We serve unknown people in distress without any tags attached for personal recognition or glory.

There should be coordination between our conventional prayers and action prayer. Through prayer, we invite God's intervention to change things within us and around us. Prayer helps build our faith and the way we see little things around us, and our thoughts about others. We seek repentance, we forgive and forget our hurtful relationships, and we begin to respect and accept people based as they are. An action of prayer is to let go of our differences, preconceived notions, and ego conflicts. The ultimate level of practicing prayer is when we start loving our enemies as our Lord did. Hence when we pray, we invite God's presence.

Reciting the liturgy or worship time rituals is not an end, but a means when we transfer it to action. Anyone who only listens to the "Good Word" and does not do what it says is like someone who looks at oneself in a mirror and immediately forgets to correct anything if required with what they look like. Hence, whoever does not forget what was told and recited as prayer puts it into practice are the ones who uses the prayers as a means and an end.

In summary, the element of turning prayer into action is moving beyond our selfish self, where we only indulge in the "give me God" prayers. If we indulge in doing good to those who need the concern or care, for example, we are moving out of our own personal needs, fears, and desires and start putting into practice what God is doing for us in this world. God has given us some talent, and if we tap into that talent and share it beyond ourselves, that itself is a small start. Let us be blessed by our actions, as we journey through this life to eternity. We pray God shows us the way how to work as His partner.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." - (Phil.2.5)

THE WORSHIPPING FAMILY- MRS. BIJI JUSTIN

Mr. and Mrs. George are parents of two kids. Tommy is five years old, and Christina is ten. The George family goes to Church every week. To attend Holy Qurbana on Sundays, they begin preparing on Saturday night. The George kids attend Sunday School, where they discover incredible things about God and His Holy Church every week.



The family starts performing evening prayers from the Sh'himo when Mr. George calls them to the prayer wall. Mrs. George reads the evening's Gospel reading.

Tommy, upset at the call, begs his mother, "Why can't we watch a movie tonight?"

Mrs. George gives Tommy a knowing glance as she places the Bible on the coffee table in front of her. "Tommy, don't forget that we prepare for the Holy Qurbana on Saturday evenings." "That's how we prepare to be with God in a specific way," Christina (Tommy's sister) explains as she nods. The family says their prayers, kisses each other goodnight and goes to bed early so they can wake up refreshed and prepared to serve God.

Tommy seems to be the only member of the George family who is not prepared to go to Holy Qurbana when Sunday morning arrives. Christina tries to help Tommy get dressed, but he is full of questions! He asks them one by one, "Didn't we pray last night? Why must we leave so early? Why do I need to dress formally? Why is going to church necessary for prayer to God? Is McDonald's available after?"

"Do you know how the Bible's first worshippers were arranged?" Christina ignores his other inquiries and replies, "God taught Moses how the heavens were set up to worship Him and Isaiah also saw this vision. Last week in Sunday school, Achen explained to us that Jesus taught the Apostles to observe Holy Qurbana as a way to remember Him. It was observed every Sunday! With so much activity taking place in front of the Holy Altar at Church that is the way we continue to live and worship today."

The family removes their shoes before entering the church, exactly as Moses did before approaching the burning bush.

Then they individually sign themselves with the Cross and say, "With reverence will I enter Your house and offer my vows to You," as they bow their heads in prayer.

Holy Qurbana is over around noon. After a short snack, Sunday School begins. Achen poses the following question to the class during Sunday School: "Why do we celebrate Holy Qurbana at the Holy Altar Room?" For some time, nobody says anything.

The question is answered by Achen himself. "Our worship is a way for us to fully commit ourselves to God, and the altar and Holy Qurbana are a representation of heaven. We worship God alongside the entire Christian Church, angels, saints, martyrs, and our own departed loved ones during the Holy Qurbana." The Eucharist, which also goes by the name Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, signifies "thanksgiving," according to Achen.

"How can we know that this worship is the right worship, Mom?" Christina inquires on the way home. With her extended hand, Mrs. George tenderly brushes her daughter's hair. She is pleased with the thoughtful questions that her daughter was posing. "My beloved, we practise an Orthodox form of worship. This means that we accept and closely abide by the traditional beliefs and practices that were established by Jesus Christ (St. Matthew 16:16) and built upon the faith of the Apostles (Romans 6:10–12), which was passed down to us through generations (Jude 3). The fact that Christ was fully human and entirely divine is a reminder of our worship. Our worship enables us to practise our religion in harmony with the early Christians



Example of how Jesus watches over us during Holy Qurbana



Example of Moses removing his shoes before approaching the burning bush

Ivana and Rheana- "God's Love Is So Wonderful"



St. George the Martyr- Shaun Shynu



Shaun Shynu- "Kanayile Kalyananaalil"



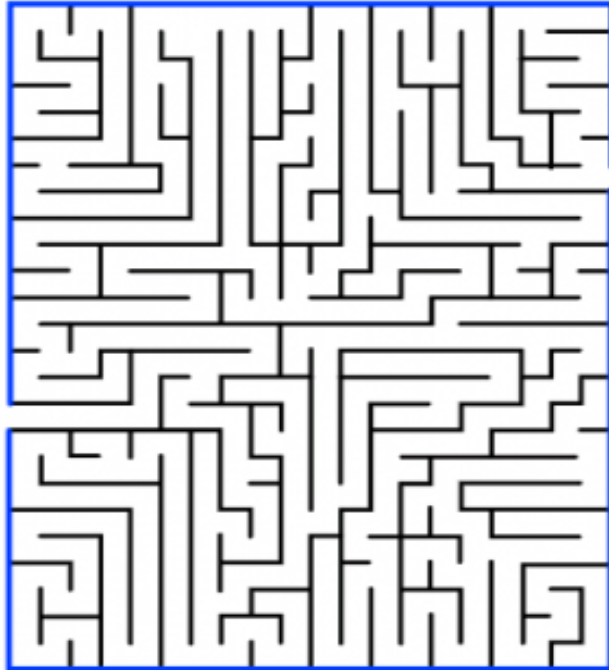
**Diocesan Group Song Competition
"Pachathapam Kattukayal"**



ACTIVITIES

Maze for Jesus Healed a Royal Official's Son

Help the royal official find his way to Jesus.



BELOW ACTIVITIES TAKEN FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL ZONE:

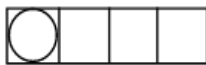
<https://sundayschoolzone.com>



Jesus Healed a Royal Official's Son Word Scramble

Unscramble each of the clue words. Take the letters that appear in the circle boxes and unscramble them to find the answer to the last phrase.

ORHU



IRMCAL



KASDE



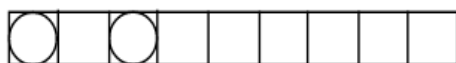
LIBEEV



DERWONS



NAMUPERCA



LEAPEDD



Jesus has the power to:



RESOURCES

Important Links:

Indian Orthodox Sunday School Northeast American Diocese - <https://nesundayschool.org/>

IOSS NE American Diocese Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/IOSS.NEAMERICANDIOCESE/>

Ministry of Liturgical Resource Development - <https://www.youtube.com/c/LiturgicalResourceDevelopment/videos>

Orthodox Terminology - <https://stgregorioscathedral.com/orthodox-terminology>

Project *Graphē* (Fr. Rijo Geevarghese) - <https://projectgraphe.wordpress.com/>

How it looks



How it really happens



