

Igumen Nikodhim (Preston)

Professional Experience

2010 to present Rector of St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church

The location of St. Nicholas in New York City and its population that, in my time, has remained fairly stable with roughly half our membership born here in America and the other half arriving via the wave of immigration in the 1990s and early 2000s, have necessitated both the routine responsibilities of all parish pastors but also response to further, other needs. In NYC, where the UN and its constituent consulates reside, the Albanian community, its politicians, its social clubs and organizations, and its other religious bodies is strong and united. I have been proud to take part regularly in the activities of Vatra and the periodic visits of foreign dignitaries from Albania and Kosova. It has been both a joy and a source of personal strength to get to know my neighbors, the hoxhas and the Roman Catholic clergy, whom I am proud to call both peers and friends. As with any sizable immigrant community, I have frequently drafted letters of support for those seeking to normalize their immigration statuses and responded to the requests of judges, attorneys, and other civil authorities, tasks I had become accustomed to already in my previous years spent in social work. Though I speak Albanian haltingly and understand it with many an acknowledged gap, I have long maintained the importance of encouraging fluency in the community here, and of my own volition and often my own resources, I have travelled to Albania and studied the Albanian tongue and culture, knowing that this is done not only to feed my own innate curiosity but in service to those who call St. Nicholas home. To the best of my knowledge, I am the longest serving pastor of St. Nicholas since Fr. Costa Belba in the 1970s. I was the fourth priest assigned to the parish in under a decade, a pattern of relatively short pastorates repeated over these past forty years and, with honesty, repeated with some harm and compromise to the faithful of this community. In 2018, we were proud to ring in the 75th anniversary of St. Nicholas and prouder still to do so with a complete overhaul and updating of our worship space, the temple. From the fire of tragedy and the loss of our sister parish, St. John's in Boston, we used their gift as the seed money to make St. Nicholas a place clean and beautiful and reflective of our generations of prayer. The generosity of the faithful was won easily by the strength of this vision. Our project was completed with excess funds, and our commitment to the Church of Albania, which was an integral part of our festivities, was the first delivered to Korça to aid them in the renovation of the Mitropolia. Though battered by the pandemic, the closure, and the long reopening, our full service schedule has now returned apace. Our pledges are at a higher level than ever before. Our Church School is bold in experimenting with hybrid in-person and online learning. And coffee hour is once again become a place to meet and greet the great family of our parish we have so missed sitting and speaking with over these past twenty months.

March 2021 to present Interim Chancellor of the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese

- 2015 to 2019 Administrator of the Department of Pastoral Life of the Orthodox Church in America
The Dept. of Pastoral Life (now the Office of the same) is charged to work with the Holy Synod to identify and strategically respond to the needs of clergy and clergy families. I entered this role after the department had languished into inactivity over most of the previous decade. Though I was not the chair of the department, I was responsible for sustaining its appointed tasks and ensuring their completion or ongoing activity. In addition to research and preparation of internal documents at the request of the Synod, I recruited and brought into monthly consultation a strong board of committed individuals both to advise and to work at providing resources and addressing issues in the lives of priests, clergy wives, and their families. In the course of my time in this position, I offered numerous retreats to clergy throughout the dioceses of the OCA and spoke regularly to assemblies of clergy and lay leaders of other Orthodox jurisdictions as well as leaders of other Christian denominations.
- 2009 to 2010 Deacon at St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church
Half of my diaconate was served without the presence of a parish rector. In those six months, I was the only cleric at St. Nicholas and worked with the lay leadership both to secure what priestly coverage we were able and to provide pastoral care to those in need inasmuch as this was possible without the ministrations of a priest and as my schedule permitted given my full-time secular employment.
- 2007 to 2009 Cantor and Pastoral Assistant at St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church
- 2008 to 2010 Service Manager at Covenant House of New Jersey
In addition to the direct care of my former position, I also took charge of supervising shifts at the shelter and ensuring that specifics of case planning, conflict resolution, and employee supervision were taking place. Notably, the financial collapse of 2008 necessitated working with significantly straitened financial resources and a consequent drastic reduction of staff while still maintaining the same high level of personal care for those who needed the services of this institution. We were at skeleton crews until late 2009 and reduced staffing until my departure from this agency.
- 2007 to 2008 Primary Youth Advisor at Covenant House of New Jersey
This was direct care for the material and physical needs and safety of a transient population of young people in Newark, NJ. More than feeding and clothing and housing, this also included establishing trusting relationships with those in crisis while identifying and referring them to programs for education, employment, legal aid, and mental health or substance abuse. Further, it meant attempting to anchor them again back into society by pursuing such mundane things as forms of picture identification, vaccination and health records, and immigration and legal documents. This was accomplished in the midst of an often chaotic setting and one rife with those challenges of youth, poverty, and familial and governmental neglect.

Volunteer Experience

Metropolitan Detention Center, Volunteer Chaplain, 2013 to present

MDC Brooklyn is a site of the Bureau of Prisons, a federal agency, and functions both as a penal institution for those serving shorter sentences and as a jail/holding facility for those awaiting trial, sentencing, or release. It houses both male and female inmates, and because of its proximity to the US District Court for the Eastern District of NY, it holds incarcerated a high number of foreign-born and extradited individuals. As the only Orthodox cleric present and one of the few Orthodox volunteers in the whole federal system, I routinely advised the chaplaincy staff on matters particular to our faith, and I was regularly called to serve the needs of inmates from a tremendous variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including attempting to get religious materials in the languages those there present needed. Before the pandemic, my schedule permitted me to visit twice each month to offer prayers, religious education, and pastoral counseling.

Founding Board Member, Thriving in Ministry, 2018 to present

The Thriving in Ministry Program sprang from a smaller venture nurtured within the OCA's Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania and aided by the then Dept. of Pastoral Life. Drafting a grant to the Lilly Foundation and receiving this award in excess of four hundred thousand dollars, we provide opportunities for clergy and clergy wives to come together and build supportive relationships under the supervision of trained facilitators. Because pastoral work can be isolating and because those institutions that track the careers of pastors have repeatedly identified supportive peer relationships as one of the mainstays of success and longevity, this tool of community and solidarity is now made available throughout both the Orthodox Church in American and by universal invitation to clergy and clergy wives of other Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States and Canada.

Mentor for five parish interns from St. Vladimir's Seminary, one from St. Tikhon's

As I was myself an intern at St. Nicholas, I am so very proud to be able to welcome other students into the parish and, for however long or briefly, into our archdiocese. These students all now serve the Church as pastors and lay leaders, and they all recall their time at St. Nicholas as one of growth and new experience. I give the credit for these fruitful relationships to the people of St. Nicholas Church, their warmth, their openness, and their friendly invitation to meet us as a community and family.

Member of the Student Fund Committee of the Albanian Archdiocese, 2009 to 2021

Education

2007 St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Tuckahoe, New York
Master of Divinity

2004 The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Master of Arts in Religious Studies

2002 The University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho
Bachelor of Arts with dual majors in Classical Languages and Culture and Music Theory

**Awards
Received**

Volunteer of the Year, Metropolitan Detention Center, Brooklyn, NY, 2017
Orthodox Church in America Seminarian Summer Internship, 2007
The John and Helen Nicozisis Grant for Missions, 2006
Presenter at the International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, Michigan, sponsored by
the St. Catherine Institute, 2004
Fr. Thomas Kennedy Scholarship for Travel in Classical Lands, 2002
Phi Beta Kappa, inducted 2002
Eta Sigma Phi (Classical Studies Honors Society), inducted 1999

**Miscellaneous
Qualifications**

Languages studied: Albanian, Latin, Greek, French, Syriac, Ge'ez
Suicide prevention and crisis intervention training and experience
Grant writing and budget preparation