

THE ORTHODOX PARISH OF ST MARTIN & ST HELEN

Newsletter: January 2025 | Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles & Ireland | *HE Metropolitan Silouan Oner*



A Day of Joy, Thanksgiving & Reflection
Sunday the 29th of December was a wonderful and poignant day in the life of our parish. **Sayedna Silouan visited for the whole weekend and after celebrating the Holy Liturgy on Sunday 29th, declared the retirement of our dear Fr Alexander Haig as parish priest and elevated him to the rank of archpriest, in recognition of his long and faithful service to building God's church in Colchester and beyond. Fr Mark Shillaker was then installed as parish priest.** St Martin's Church was packed with regular worshippers and many others of the faithful and friends whose lives have been touched by Fr Alexander's ministry and the love and support of his devoted Khouria Hilary. Their daughter Margaret was also in attendance, to lend her support and to sing in the choir. It was a beautiful and moving liturgy, with not a few tears on this most momentous of occasions. The service was followed by a splendid lunch provided by the faithful and held in Castle Methodist church hall, at which alongside the delicious food and fellowship, there were speeches and presentations. Many thanks to all who attended and helped arrange the day. **May the Lord bless Fr Alexander's retirement as a new and fruitful spiritual journey! Pray for him and for all of us here in the parish.**

A Remarkable Journey & Ministry

Pilgrimage to Orthodoxy: Father Alexander was involved, with a number of other Anglican clergy and their families, back in the early 1990s, in a movement towards Holy Orthodoxy led by Father Michael Harper of blessed memory, a well known Anglican priest of 30 years and subsequently Archpriest in the Antiochian Orthodox Church. This movement was not merely a reaction against certain controversial developments in the Church of England but was born of a deep faithfulness among the participants to the *traditional* Christian Faith. Ultimately a switch of allegiance to Holy Orthodoxy became the only tenable course of action for Father Alexander and his peers.

Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood: Father Alexander was ordained **deacon** in Paris in the Spring of 1996 by the Antiochian Bishop Gabriel, and subsequently ordained **priest**, later that year in the same city by the same bishop. The community in Colchester could now become a parish in the proper sense and enter into the fullness of Orthodox worship and life.

Missions and A Faithful Community: *Father Alexander, aided as ever by Khouria Hilary has done so much to spread the Orthodox Faith in the East of England. With the parish in Colchester as 'nucleus'; he was instrumental in establishing, now thriving Orthodox communities in Norfolk and Basildon as well as for many years serving a regular Divine Liturgy in Clacton and at the University of Essex (Fr Mark is now university chaplain).*

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Luke 25:21

The Chapel of St Helen, a new home in 2000..

The yet young Orthodox Community of St Helen acquired the ancient and beautiful St Helen's Chapel for use as a place of worship in November 2000. This was after some years in a number of temporary 'homes' including a local CO-OP funeral chapel. Father Alexander had, even before this, been looking for a permanent home for the parish among several local, decommissioned churches, **including St Martin's Church**, which the parish eventually acquired only in early 2022.

Faith really can move mountains!



THE FEAST OF THEOPHANY 2025 MARKS THE START OF A NEW ERA IN THE PARISH

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity wast made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, Who hath appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee! Troparion Tone 4



Father Alexander is to me a friend, teacher and mentor. As I now assume the formal responsibilities of parish priest, I am constantly aware of the immense and abiding legacy which he has achieved, by the Grace of God, in his many years of ministry. Reading back through the huge stack of archived newsletters (going back in one form or another to 1994) is a humbling experience. It is impossible in this one issue to even *begin* to do justice to the incredible journey of our God blessed community from its earliest days, with Father and Khouria Hilary at the helm, to where we are now, burgeoning in St Martin's Church. We are now a much larger worshipping community in numbers, which is a fine thing - for it is good to watch Holy Orthodoxy light a fire in hearts and minds and bring the thirsty to the source of Living Water (John 4:10). However, as Sayedna said during his visit, while it is good to see the church full of people, it is even better to see it full of love! I pray therefore that, with whatever strength God gives us, Khouria Paula and I can pick up the torch which has been so faithfully carried thus far and continue to run steadfastly, with love and faithfulness to God and to His holy people, and that the fruits of love may grow ever more fruitfully in the parish. It seems that the world is now entering challenging times and I ask your prayers for me and for my dear wife, that we may serve you with love, joy and prayerful attentiveness in the years ahead, as God grants. *Father Mark*

+Great Blessing of the Waters+

Unfortunately, the bridge over the River Colne at Middle Mill remains closed for another year, while Colchester City Council apparently has no firm plans to even begin repairs. I recently attended an event held by local people (including a friend of the parish and Castle Ward Councillor Kemal Cufoglu and former MP Bob Russell) to protest the City Council's inaction. We hope that the bridge, such an important route for cyclists and pedestrians and for those who live nearby, north of the river, will be repaired and opened again soon! **Because of the closure we will again have the service for the Great Blessing of the Waters inside the church on Sunday 5th January, after the liturgy.**

ADDITIONAL SERVICES FOR JANUARY 2025

Monday 6 January: *The Holy Theophany of Our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ | Hours & Divine Liturgy from 9:15 am St Helen's Chapel*

Thursday 16 January: *Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Holy Apostle Peter | Hours & Divine Liturgy from 9:15 am St Helen's Chapel.*

Tuesday 21 January: *St Maximus the Confessor | Hours & Divine Liturgy from 9:15 am St Helen's Chapel.*

Thursday 30 January: *Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Great Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian & John Chrysostom | Hours & Divine Liturgy from 9:15 am St Helen's Chapel.*

We are grateful to those continuing to support our church by regular or occasional gifts; may God bless you. Bank details:
Orthodox Parish of St Martin & St Helen:
Registered Charity No: 1192469 IBAN:
GB05BUKB20226780219819 Sort Code:
20-22-67 Account No: 50349364 Appeal
Account No: 80219819



Regular Service Times:

Saturdays: Great Vespers 4:30pm

Sundays: Matins & Holy Liturgy from 9:30am

Weekend services ALL at St Martins. Additional (weekday) services usually at St Helen's Chapel unless otherwise stated.

St Helen's Chapel is open daily for prayer and pilgrimage.

St Martin's Church, West Stockwell Street, CO1 1HN

St Helen's Chapel, Maidenburgh Street, CO1 1UB.

Both temples are off the High Street, but accessible from there only on foot. Nearest car park NCP: Nunns Road, CO1 1EJ.

Confessions: Saturdays 5pm, after Vespers or by arrangement. **Holy Marriage, Holy Baptism, Funerals, Memorials etc: by arrangement.**

Parish Priest: Father Mark Shillaker 24 Orchard Gardens, Ipswich Rd, CO4 0BX Mobile: 07917 161 295 | Email: markshillaker@gmail.com

The Very Reverend Father Archpriest Alexander Haig (retired), 17 Maidenburgh Street, CO1 1UB. Phone: 01206 530 530 \ Mobile: 07947 047 201 Email: parishpriest@orthodoxcolchester.org.uk **parish website: orthodoxcolchester.org.uk**