



Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology, and Religion
2023 Annual Report
Submitted to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops

As a nonprofit of Orthodox Christian professionals in the fields of medicine, psychology, and religion, OCAMPR continues to actively serve our membership and the Orthodox community with energy and enthusiasm. We remain focused on using our professional talents for God's glory and in the service of the Orthodox Church. 2023 was a year of substantial growth in membership, programming, and networking, details of which are described below.

Board Member Composition:

2023 was a continuation of terms for all of the board members, with no changes. Board members are: Dr. Randa Anderson, President; Susan Zacharia Sanders, LCSW, Vice President; Dr. Sarah Byrne-Martelli, D.Min BCC- Secretary; Fr. Andrew Andrews, MHA-Treasurer; Fr. Sean Levine, D.Min-Religion Chairperson; Dr. Ioana Popa-Medical Chairperson; Joel Klepac LMFT-Psychology Chairperson; and Dr. Mena Mesiha-Associate Members Chairperson, and Dean Theophilos, MA, Board-Member-at-Large. This continuity allowed the board to improve many aspects of OCAMPR's programming and administration without interruption.

OCAMPR Board of Directors



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Organizational Management:

The primary aim of the current OCAMPR board is to set up the organization for growth, longevity, and continuity. Recognizing that our volunteers would not realistically be able to put in the work hours necessary to grow the organization, the board voted in May of 2023 to hire an independent contractor to help manage projects of the board. Keely Andrews Sarsama began working 10 hours per week in June and quickly became instrumental in program development and implementation, as well as communication, membership tracking, and development.

Keely's work has allowed us to offer more frequent communication, in the form of a newsletter. She has put a process in place to track membership, and she communicates regularly with individuals whose membership is up for renewal. She assists the OCAMPR board with other tasks necessary to implement OCAMPR events, such as the Community of Practice and the Annual Conference.

The board contracted with a webmaster in January of 2023, who resigned to pursue other projects in June of 2023. Working with an interim volunteer, OCAMPR continually added to and improved both the website and the membership portal, in order to keep our membership and the general public updated about our offerings. In November of 2023, the board engaged the services of a new webmaster, who is continually updating our website and portal.

2023 Annual Conference:

The major event for OCAMPR is our Annual Conference, during which our membership gathers for fellowship and education; this includes an added benefit of recording presentations for viewing by the public. The OCAMPR 2023 Annual Conference, on the theme "Sacred Hospitality: The Healing Encounter," took place in person at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL (Chicago area). 146 people attended the event, a number that well surpassed 2022 attendance. Over 60 of those attendees were new to OCAMPR and were attending the conference for the first time. Attendees came from countries as far as Australia, Greece, Germany, and Uganda. The retreat-like setting of the venue was ideal for building community, connection, and collaboration among our attendees.

With a grant from the Hellenic Foundation, we were able to keep our registration fees low, as well as offer some scholarship assistance to those who couldn't afford the full cost. We believe this grant enabled increased participation and we are hopeful to continue our connection with the Hellenic Foundation in the future. This grant also allowed us to afford paying for audio and video recording by Fr. John Parsells/Orthodox 360. Recording is a cost we incurred for the first time, because Ancient Faith Radio is no longer recording conferences.

A special aspect of the 2023 conference was the commemoration of the OCAMPR's 35th anniversary. Several past presidents and advisory board members were present, including Fr. Stephen Muse, Fr. Vasilios Thermos, Dr. Gayle Woloschak and Dr. Philip Mamalakis.

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2023 Conference Participants

Conference highlights included the Keynote address offered by His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas. The medical, psychological, and theological plenary presentations were offered by Carla Thomas, MD, Family Medicine Physician, Anniston, AL; Fr. Stephen Muse, PhD, LMFT, LPC, Director, Clergy-in-Kairos Program, Pastoral Institute, Columbus, GA; and Nadia Kizenko, Ph.D., Director of Religious Studies & Professor of History, University of Albany, Albany, NY

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2023 Keynote and Plenaries



16 workshops and 10 papers were presented by OCAMPR professionals on a variety of themes related to the healing professions. The workshops included didactic and interactive components, with Orthodox Christian theology and praxis as the foundation. The paper presentations were read by the authors. Some of these presentations will be published in a combined academic journal/conference proceedings volume, which will be posted on our new journal website.

2023 Workshops & Papers



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A yearly highlight of the conference is the vendor/exhibitor area, which gives other Orthodox organizations an opportunity to share their work and sell their products to our conference participants. Sharing their information in the exhibit area were The Assembly of Bishops (specifically highlighting Mental Health Ministries), Orthodox Youth Ministries, The Hellenic College/Holy Cross, Orthodox Christian Coaching Network, Agape Circle, The Family Wellness Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, Axia Women, and St. Phoebe Center. Park End Press, Sebastian Press, and Lift Up Uganda displayed and sold their books and products.

2023 Vendors



Community of Practice:

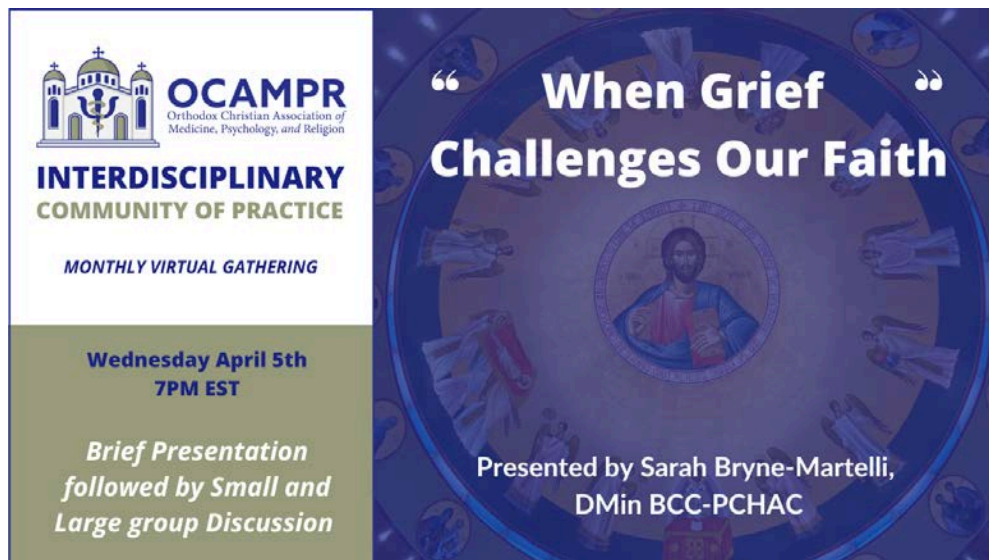
Led by Membership Co-chairs Dr. Ioana Popa and Joel Klepac, for the second year we continued our near-monthly "Community of Practice" online events. A Community of Practice is an organized group of people who have a common professional interest and who come together regularly to learn from each other, gain new skills, and collaborate with other professionals. These Community of Practice events are truly unique gatherings. They offer the benefit of improving our

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professional work, while sharing fellowship and drawing on the beauty and richness inherent to our Orthodox Christian faith.

Community of Practice gatherings include a 10-15 minute presentation by an OCAMPR professional on a topic relevant to professionals in medicine, psychology, and religion, as well as small and large group discussions on the day's topic. The goals of these events are fellowship and networking, as well as continuing education, and participants engage in thoughtful conversations with other professionals.

Topics and presenters in 2023 included, "One and Yet Varied: Tending the Wounds of Families with Disabilities with Discernment" by Presvytera Melanie DiStefano, MDIV & Natalie Kapeluck Nixon, BA; "The Interface between Orthodox Clergy and Orthodox Professional Caregivers" by Bishop JOHN, DMin, Antiochian Bishop of Worcester and New England; "Becoming Human and the Healing Professions" by Fr. Sean A. Levine, Chaplain (Major) US Army, M.A.T.S, M.A.B.L., M.S. (MFT), M.Div. For a complete list of all past Community of Practice events, please see our website (<https://ocampr.org/community-of-practice-gatherings/>). Over 200 people registered for and attended these events in total.



Synergeia: The Journal of the OCAMPR:

OCAMPR began as a group of Orthodox academics and clinicians who gathered to share their scholarship and clinical expertise in the context of faith. Over the years, OCAMPR published the conference proceedings in a hardbound edition that was shared with the Bishops of the Assembly and OCAMPR members and was housed in the Holy Cross School of Theology Library. Interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, OCAMPR had not published anything since 2018. Efforts to publish were resumed in 2023, and the 2019 publication was finalized and shared in digital form only, within the membership portal.

Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Steve-John Harris, the editorial board, Dr. Helen Theodoropoulos, Dr. Jim Burg, and Dr. Cathy Creticos, along with the OCAMPR board, sought to develop the publication further during 2023. We clarified publication standards and a more rigorous blind peer review process. This year, the new OCAMPR journal, *Synergeia: The Journal of the Orthodox Christian Association of*

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Medicine, Psychology and Religion, began a new chapter. *Synergeia* publishes noteworthy articles and publications from the proceedings of the annual OCAMPR conference. The journal offers articles ranging from academic and clinical research, to plenaries, to probing reflections on the work of faith and healing.

Its name, *Synergeia*, is a powerful concept central to the life of faith, as we seek to serve as “fellow-workers” with God. This name is not new to OCAMPR publications, as the name was used for a newsletter in the early 2000s.

Synergeia will be offered to the general public via a subdomain of the OCAMPR website (<https://journal.ocampr.org/>). We hope to distribute hardbound editions to the Bishops of the Assembly every two years, as we expect to combine two years’ worth of articles into each hardbound edition.

Membership Growth:

The increasingly intentional management of OCAMPR, as well as increased program offerings, has no doubt led to the increase in membership. In January of 2023, we had 115 members. This number steadily rose to 195 by the end of December 2023. Our email list-serve and social media pages reach over 1,500 people, and the number continually increases as more people learn of our organization.

Collaboration with the Mental Health Ministries of the Assembly of Bishops:

The OCAMPR board and many of its members continued, in 2023, to volunteer their time and professional talents to the Mental Health Ministries of the Assembly of Bishops. OCAMPR President, Dr. Randa Anderson, and Religion Chairperson, Fr. Sean Levine, continued as consultants to the steering committee and offered input into current projects. During the 2023 OCAMPR conference, MHM held their annual meeting and set forth plans for the 2024 year. They also presented a workshop, which was well attended by conference participants.

The National Directory of Orthodox Mental Health Providers is continually adding new providers to the database (<https://www.assemblyofbishops.org/directories/mental-health>). Many of these providers are OCAMPR members.

In the spring of 2023, OCAMPR was contacted by multiple Orthodox camps from different jurisdictions, inquiring if we could offer training on mental health for their counselors and staff. OCAMPR worked with Sangeetha Thomas on addressing this need, which is now being filled by the Assembly’s Peace of Mind Facilitators.

Public Outreach:

Motivated to offer education on current issues in our fields from an Orthodox viewpoint, OCAMPR board members and conference presenters offered numerous podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio (Appendix A). The topics covered were relevant to the general public, with many focusing on mental health and social issues. OCAMPR welcomes the opportunity to share our professional knowledge integrated with Orthodox praxis for the benefit of the Orthodox community.

Additionally, we expanded our YouTube Channel to include past recordings reaching back to 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/@ocampr8542/playlists>). Our conference recordings also remain on a separate Ancient Faith Radio page

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(<https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/ocampr>), and we are pleased to share our conferences with a wider audience on two different platforms. Notably, analytics from YouTube and Ancient Faith Radio indicate our videos and podcasts reached an online audience of over 2000 people in 2023.

Looking to the future:

The OCAMPR board is continuing to explore how to increase offerings to members, while setting up the organization for longevity, growth, and efficient administration. In addition, we are finding that other Orthodox organizations are looking to us for collaboration, and we expect to increase these connections in ways that benefit Orthodox Christians across the US.

While we believe that membership is growing because of increased offerings that support professionals in their development, we also believe that members join because they eagerly seek to connect their work with their Orthodox faith. OCAMPR members care about living out our shared Christian faith in our vocations, and they seek community, collaboration and connection with other like-minded professionals. OCAMPR's members, programs, communications, and benefits have created a unique and expanding community of Orthodox Christian practitioners.

We are grateful to be an affiliate ministry of the Assembly. We hope and pray that our work reflects the generosity of the Assembly in caring for the Orthodox flock in America. We aim to continue offering our ministry for God's glory and the benefit of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Respectfully submitted,



Randa K. Anderson, Ph.D., President,
Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology and Religion

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Appendix A

Podcasts from OCAMPR Board Members & Conference Presenters

“When Families Wrestle with Addiction,” Ioana Popa, MD, BCC on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/when_families_wrestle_with_addiction

“Building an Orthodox Marriage,” Bishop John Abdalah on *Family Matters*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/familymatters/building_an_orthodox_marriage

“Fully Human Edition: Major in Your Strengths: A Positive Perspective of ADHD,” Joel Klepac, LMFT on *Family Matters*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/familymatters/fully_human_edition_major_in_your_strengths_a_positive_perspective_of_adhd

“Addiction & the Family: Navigating Addiction and Recovery for Family and Friends,” Dean Theophilis, LCPC on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/addiction_the_family_navigating_addiction_and_recovery_for_family_and_friend

“An Honest Conversation about Medical Aid in Dying,” Sarah Byrne-Martelli, D.Min., BCC on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/an_honest_conversation_about_medical_aid_in_dying

“Meet Sarah Byrne-Martelli,” Sarah Byrne-Martelli, D.Min., BCC on *Everyday Orthodox*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/everydayorthodox/meet_sarah_byrne_martelli

“Celebrating and Supporting ADHD Members of our Families and Churches,” Joel Klepac, LMFT on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/celebrating_and_supporting_adhd_members_of_our_families_and_churches

“Acquiring the Spirit of Peace as Parents,” Dr. Sofie Azmy on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/acquiring_the_spirit_of_peace_as_parents

“End of Life Issues and Palliative Care,” Daniel Hinshaw, M.D. on *Live with the Louhs*
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/livewiththelouhs/end_of_life_issues_palliative_care