Welcome to Semester II and to the first edition of our newly designed and renamed newsletter Koinonia.

The word “Koinonia” was first mentioned in the Greek New Testament in Acts 2:42-47 to describe the Christians of the early church: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common.”

Koinonia is a fitting word that describes our College community that is engaged in theological dialogue, in the life of prayer, and unites around the Eucharist. Accordingly, the word summarises the aspirations we have for our Theological College; the faculty, the staff, and the students being united through Christ in a common purpose, a common vision, and a common goal.

Some of these aspirations are already being realised this academic year which has resulted in some exciting news for our College. We have two new members who have joined our faculty. Shaheer Sedhom, who completed his Masters of Theological Studies at Holy Cross Greek School of Theology in Brookline, MA, will teach a New Testament unit in Semester II with Dr Amir Malek. He is also continuing his studies at Trinity College toward a PhD in New Testament Studies.

Lisa Agaiby joined our faculty full-time this month. Lisa has two Masters degrees from Macquarie University in Sydney; her first was in Egyptology, and her second was in Coptic Studies. She has been on several excavations at ancient sites in Egypt, and comes to us with a wealth of knowledge and experience. Lisa will teach a unit on Coptic Monasticism in Semester II; and next year, she will teach units in Coptic Art and Archaeology, and in Coptic History. She is also completing her PhD on the history of the Monastery of Saint Anthony at the Red Sea. We welcome Lisa and wish her every success at our college.

We were honoured during Semester I to have one of the world’s leading Coptologists, Professor Heike Behlmer, present a seminar to our students on the Digital Edition of the Coptic Old Testament – a major project for which she is chairperson. The lecture was well received, and a healthy discussion about this important work took place afterward.

During April, we signed our collegiate agreement with the University of Divinity, and we have also been included in the University’s Strategic Plan and Vision for the next ten years. More information about this will come in our next newsletter.

SACOTC has submitted an application to offer our Diploma in Theology wholly online, particularly for students residing outside of Melbourne. We have also submitted an application to teach the Advanced Diploma in Theology, and later this year we anticipate applying to the University of Divinity for approval to offer graduate awards. Our staff and faculty are working diligently, and I certainly appreciate their great efforts to advance our college.

Finally, our second campus, located in Melbourne’s CBD, is progressing well as part of the Eporo Tower project, which is due for completion in January 2017. Wishing you all success in your studies and research.

Bishop Suriel
Chancellor and Dean
His Grace Bishop Suriel’s Address to Students

The conclusion of first semester marked three and a half years since we received accreditation through what was previously the Melbourne College of Divinity, and has now become the University of Divinity. Our first four graduates received their awards in 2014, and another eleven students graduated in March 2015. I congratulate those students who completed their Diploma in Theology. We are proud of your achievements. Your support for the College, and for our vision for theological education is highly valued by the faculty, the staff, and myself.

I hope that graduates of our Theological College will become future leaders in this Diocese. From among you will perhaps come bishops; priests; monks; nuns; Sunday School teachers; and parents who will lead successful Christian families and rear their children in the Orthodox faith in this ever-changing, multicultural society with its many, different value systems. The theological foundation that you have attained at the College is the cornerstone of your Orthodox faith. Moreover, theological education is vital for the continuation of the Coptic Orthodox faith in this nation. Do not, therefore, underestimate the importance of your studies.

It is my expectation that you will share your experiences at the College with others and encourage them to study here, so that they too may see the importance of what is being accomplished.

Although you may be unaware of it, behind the scenes, the faculty and staff are working diligently and exceptionally hard in order to advance the College to the next stage. At present, we are looking at progressing the Diploma of Theology to an Advanced Diploma of Theology. We are also looking at implementing a Graduate Certificate, and a Graduate Diploma in Theology which would lead into a Masters of Theology.

Another component of our vision for the College will be to have full-time students who live on campus. We aim to continue to expand the facilities here so that this may be one day possible.

These are some of my hopes and goals, and I believe that the faculty and staff share this same vision with me. But this is not my work alone; as a community we must work together to achieve our goals for the College.

We continue to send students abroad to study so that they may return and join our faculty. One such example is Shaheer Sedhom who completed his Masters in Theological studies last year and has graduated. He has now commenced studies at Trinity College toward a PhD in New Testament Studies. In semester II, he will teach a New Testament unit with Dr Amir Malek. Another student, Abraam Mikhail, is currently at St Vladimir’s undertaking his Masters degree, and hopes to progress to a PhD. We are always looking to expand our faculty, so that we can offer a wider variety of units. This is essential for the growth of the Theological College.

I am excited to announce that the Dean of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, Father John Behr, has agreed to come and teach an intensive unit on Patristics between Semesters I and II in 2016.

We are liaising with Coptic scholars so that they may also teach intensive units and deliver lectures to add to the variety of those units already offered at the college. These will be announced in due time.
Registrar’s Update

Welcome to our fifth newsletter.

Semester I of 2015 has been a challenging and exciting time for us at the College. Challenging, as we work hard to find innovative ways to improve our College; and exciting, as we engage with our community and build relationships with a wider audience to grow SACOTC into the Theological College we have dreamed about.

This year, the staff of the College have been working very diligently to forge a path toward the introduction of higher degrees, and to develop more units to increase both the depth and breadth of our offerings. The work that is being done to this end is a testament to the commitment of all our staff to provide an outstanding experience for our students. We have now doubled the number of units available since we started three and a half years ago. For those of you studying at SACOTC, or those thinking of doing so, this will mean more online units for you to choose from, allowing more flexibility, and more interesting units of study.

Two new units have been added to the timetable for Semester II. These are Monasticism in Egypt 1 which will be taught by Lisa Agaiby one of our new lecturers; and Understanding the Family – A Christian Perspective, that will be taught by Dr Samir Ibrahim.

Key dates for Semester II are as follows:

- Commencement of Semester II: Monday 27th July, 2015
- Census date: Tuesday 18th August, 2015

I wish you all the best in your studies in Semester II.

Jacqueline Mina
Registrar

I am pleased to inform you that the construction of our second campus which is to be located in Eporo Tower in the Melbourne CBD is well underway. The church level of the building on the first floor is currently being completed. The campus will be situated on an entire level and will comprise four lecture theatres, a small library, and registrar’s office. It will be a hub of activity for our Theological College. The new campus will be particularly suitable for those who reside in the western side of the city, since they will no longer need to commute to Donvale.

In Semester I, we were able to obtain approval by the University for nine new units. Four of these units are offered online. As mentioned, we have submitted a proposal to the University to offer our Diploma in Theology wholly online. This will enable students anywhere in the world to study with the College.

So, as you can see, much exciting progress is taking place. We need your input, but we also need your financial support. Theological education is a very expensive process. The Diocese is, of course, supporting the College financially otherwise it would not have been able to continue. Therefore, we must seriously consider various fundraising strategies. We ask for your prayers and support that this important project may be successfully completed.

May the Lord Christ bless you all.

Bishop Suriel
St Vladimir’s Seminary Press (SVS Press), the publishing house of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, has launched a new series highlighting the history and spirituality of the ancient Coptic Orthodox Church. The first book in the ‘Coptic Studies Series’, entitled The Life of Repentance and Purity, was authored by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and is scheduled for release by March 2016. His Grace Bishop Suriel, bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and its Affiliated Regions, Australia, who studied at St Vladimir’s from 1998–1999, is Series Editor for the new line of books.

Pope Shenouda’s book was first translated from Arabic in 1989 by Bishop Suriel, and was published in 1991 by the Coptic Orthodox Publication and Translation Committee in Sydney. The new translation, also by Bishop Suriel, will include additions and patristic references and will be a joint publication between SVS Press and SAC Press, the fledgling publishing house of St Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College in Donvale, Australia, where His Grace acts as Dean. More information about SAC Press will come in our next newsletter.

“This is a big step forward for us”, noted Bishop Suriel, “Being in cooperation with SVS Press, which is well known around the world—even outside of Orthodox circles—will provide more recognition of our own Theological Press”.

“I am deeply indebted to Father Athanasius Farag, Father Bishoy Lamie, Phoebe Farag, and several others who worked tirelessly to prepare the manuscript that was presented to SVS Press”, he continued. “I am also grateful to Father John Behr, Dean of St Vladimir’s, and to Michael Soroka and Deacon Gregory Hatrak of SVS Press, for their hard work in assisting in bringing this work to light once more in a much better edition!”

“We hope to be able to publish more works in the future, especially with the new series, which we are very excited about,” he said. “We want not only to raise the profile of our College, but also to emphasise the importance of Coptic Studies”.

One of the titles that His Grace will propose for the ‘Coptic Studies Series’ is a book about the life and work of Saint Archdeacon Habib Girgis, former dean of the Coptic Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, who was recently canonised by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Saint Habib Girgis greatly influenced the Coptic community by urging its members to develop educational curricula that would revitalise their faith, which in the early 20th century, was being challenged by foreign missionaries.

“The ties between St Vladimir’s Seminary and St Athanasius Coptic

Bishop Suriel presents an icon in the Coptic tradition to Fr John Behr

SVS Press Launches Coptic Studies Series

Bishop Suriel signs the agreement, assisted by Production Manager and Associate Editor Michael Soroka of SVS Press
Orthodox Theological College have been strengthening during the past few years”, acknowledged Fr John Behr. “Both Bishop Suriel and I, as the deans of two theological institutions—who also happen to be close friends—highly value theological education and acknowledge the importance of rapprochement between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox traditions in the 21st century”.

In 2013, Bishop Suriel hosted Fr John during an eventful trip to Egypt, where he was the guest of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria. During his visit, Fr John delivered a paper entitled, “Orthodox Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century”, at the Theological and Ecclesiastical Institutes Seminar which explored the spiritual formation of theological students. Held at the Anaphora Institute, a retreat and training centre near the desert road between Cairo and Alexandria, the seminar featured talks by eminent Coptic bishops, clergy, and scholars.

Bishop Suriel visited St Vladimir’s campus in 2013, at which time he met with Fr John Behr to discuss greater collaborative efforts between the two theological schools, including exchanges of students and faculty. As a result, Fr John, professor of Patristics at St Vladimir’s and globally renowned in his field, will teach a Patristics course at St Athanasius in June/July 2016. Further into the future, both deans envision a Coptic House of Studies on the Yonkers campus, at which faculty from the Coptic Church may provide special liturgical and pastoral formation to students from that tradition.

Bishop Suriel was featured in The SVS Vine: Annual Report FY 2014, which included a video of his plea for prayer for persecuted Coptic Christians.

(This article has been adapted from the story featured at: https://www.svots.edu/heads/press-launches-coptic-studies-series)

Lands of Immigration Seminar May 2015

Under the auspices of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, an historic four day conference focusing on aspects concerning the future of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the lands of immigration, took place at St Paul’s Monastery Retreat Centre at the Red Sea, Egypt, from May 20 to 23. Delegates included bishops from Australia, North and South America, and England, together with clergy and lay representation from the dioceses in attendance. The objective of the conference was to initiate a dialogue to define a future vision about the service of the Church in the lands of immigration; specifically, Australia and the Americas. Each bishop was requested to present on an aspect affecting the spiritual, social, theological and educational needs of the Church service in the diaspora.

His Grace Bishop Suriel presented on the importance of Coptic Orthodox theological schools in the lands of immigration, and proposed a future vision for theological education. This vision involves having three accredited centres of Theological excellence: one in Australasia (SACOTC), one in North America, and one in the UK. All other Coptic Theological Colleges could then merge with one of these three major colleges to form three theological consortia. Such a consortia will encourage strong collaborations and foster exchange of resources; human or otherwise. This will also enable our theological institutions to become more specialised, as we compliment the strengths of each other.

Another important recommendation proposed by His Grace Bishop Suriel is to foster the development of Coptic seminaries for the training of prospective clergy in ministry and Orthodoxy. He proposed that a future goal for bishops is to ensure that no man be ordained into the priesthood without first obtaining a degree in theology, in accordance to the criteria of sound theological education championed by St Habib Girgis.
Dean of St Vladimir’s to Teach Intensive Patristics Unit in 2016

Fr John Behr is the Dean of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and Professor of Patristics. He teaches courses in patristics, dogmatics, and scriptural exegesis at the Seminary. He also teaches at Fordham University, where he is the Distinguished Lecturer in Patristics.

Fr John hails from England, though his family background is Russian and German; and clerical on both sides. From the Russian side, his great-grandfather was sent to London by Metropolitan Evlogy to serve there as a priest in 1926. His father was also a priest, ordained by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, as are his brother (at St Paul’s Monastery on Mt Athos) and his brother-in-law (St Cyril and Methodius, Terryville, CT). His maternal grandparents served in the Lutheran Church in Germany, where his grandfather was a Lutheran pastor.

After completing his first degree in Philosophy at Thames Polytechnic, London in 1987, Fr John spent a year studying in Greece. In 1991, he finished a Masters in Philosophy in Eastern Christian Studies at Oxford University, under Bishop Kallistos Ware, who subsequently supervised his doctoral work, which was examined by Fr Andrew Louth and Rowan Williams, the previous Archbishop of Canterbury. Fr John earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theology from Oxford University in 1995.

While working on his doctorate, he was invited to be a Visiting Lecturer at St Vladimir’s Seminary in 1993, where he has been a permanent faculty member since 1995.

Fr John completed a Master of Theology from St Vladimir’s in 1997, where he had already been teaching on a full-time basis for two years. His thesis, a complete textual criticism of On the Apostolic Preaching by Irenaeus of Lyons, was subsequently published by St Vladimir’s Seminary Press. Fr John was tenured in 2000, and ordained in 2001.

Before becoming Dean in 2007, he served as the editor of St Vladimir’s Ordination of Fr Gregorios Awad

After having declared the words “We call you Gregorios,” His Grace Bishop Suriel bestowed the holy sacrament of priesthood on Dr Magdi Awad during the Divine Liturgy at St Mina and St Marina Coptic Orthodox Church in Hallam on Saturday the 6th June 2015. This joyful occasion was attended by many clergy and congregation of the Diocese of Melbourne. Dr Alan Niven from Stirling College and Fr Jacob Joseph from the Indian Orthodox Church also celebrated this joyful occasion with us.

Since the mid 1990s Fr Gregorios Awad has been actively involved in Church ministry both in Egypt and Australia, teaching biblical and dogmatic studies, as well as Coptic language. From 2009, Fr Gregorios has been instrumental at SACOTC in teaching Systematic and Ritual Theology, Ancient Languages, and Coptic Liturgy and History. He holds a PhD in Theology and the History of Dogma from Greece, and a PhD in Oriental and Byzantine Christianity from Germany.

Having spent his 40-day retreat in the Monastery of El-Baramous in the Wadi al-Natrun, Fr Gregorios returns to SACOTC to continue his role as Senior Lecturer and Academic Dean, and his main duties in the College will be focused on teaching and education.

We sincerely congratulate Fr Gregorios Awad for his ordination to the priesthood, and wish him a blessed ministry and continued success at SACOTC.
Dr Amir Malek

Theological Quarterly, and he still edits the Popular Patristics Series for SVS Press.

His early work centred on issues of asceticism and anthropology, focusing on St Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria. After spending almost a decade on the second century, Fr John began the publication of a series on the Formation of Christian Theology, and has now reached the fifth and sixth centuries. He has also published a synthetic presentation of the theology of the early centuries, which focused on the mystery of Christ.

Teaching Experience:

Distinguished Lecturer in Patristics, Fordham University 2005-present.
Professor of Patristics, St Vladimir's Seminary, 2004-present.
Associate Professor of Patristics, St Vladimir's Seminary, 2000-2004.
Assistant Professor of Patristics, St Vladimir's Seminary, 1997-2000.
Lecturer in Patristics, St Vladimir's Seminary, 1995-97.
Visiting Professor of Patristics, St Vladimir's Seminary, 1993-94.
Mansfield College, Oxford University: Undergraduate lecture series delivered during Michaelmas 1992

Major Publications:

The Way to Nicaea
Fr John’s first major work, The Way to Nicaea, published in 2001, follows early Christian reflection beginning with the Scriptural Christ and continuing through to the Council of Antioch. This first of three volumes primarily consist of the examination of certain theologians, their works, and the controversies in which they were engaged.

The Nicene Faith: Formation Of Christian Theology
Released in 2004, The Nicene Faith examines the theological reflection of the fourth century, beginning with the church-shaking debates that led to the Council of Nicaea and ending with their resolution at the Council of Constantinople.

The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death
A systematic presentation of theology that emerged from Fr John’s first two volumes, The Way to Nicaea and The Nicene Faith, this book provides a vision of Christian theology that challenges the reader to rethink the modern historical approach to theology—a discipline that has become ever-more fragmented in its study.

Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity
This book provides a full, contextual study of St Irenaeus of Lyons, the first great theologian of the Christian tradition. Fr John Behr sets Irenaeus both within his own context of the second century, a fundamental period for the formation of Christian identity, elaborating the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy and expounding a comprehensive theological vision, and also within our own contemporary context, in which these issues are very much alive again.

(Bhttp://www.svspress.com/irenaeus-of-lyons-identifying-christianity-1/)

Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image
In this book, Fr John Behr challenges readers to think again about who they are, as male and female; what they are called to become; and the relation between life and death in this journey. Presented in a poetic and meditative manner, adorned by images and offset quotations, this book inclines the reader toward a meditative reading, weighing, rather than skimming, each word and image.


This article is adapted from the one featured at: https://www.svots.edu/profile/very-rev-dr-john-behr)

The Exciting Journey of my PhD

I would like to share this exciting journey with you that I started this year; and which I am enjoying very much so far! I am preparing a PhD on one of the works of a twelfth century Coptic priest, Mark Ibn al-Qanbar. I am translating and critically analysing his commentary on the book of Genesis.

The importance of this work lies in the following points:

1. Ibn al-Qanbar is probably the only person in the Coptic Church during this period who wrote complete commentaries on the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). He wrote his commentaries in Arabic following the decline of the Coptic and Greek languages in the writings of the Church following the Arab invasion in the seventh century. It also shows how the Copts astonishingly mastered writing in this new language in a relatively short period of time.
2. Ibn al-Qanbar composed his commentary on Genesis specifically so that it might be read during the days of Lent in the churches. Therefore, he centred the commentary on a common theme of repentance.
3. Ibn al-Qanbar was an advocate of private confession when the sacrament was being neglected by the Church during that time. This view is frequently reflected in his writings.
4. Ibn al-Qanbar himself was a controversial figure. His clash with the authorities of the Church raised an endless argument of whether he was a rebel or a reformer.

This PhD journey has been very exciting for me thus far. The history of the Church post-Arab conquest fascinates me. The Arab invasion and the subsequent persecution of the Copts, weakened teaching in the Church for some time. Yet God preserved great teachers who contributed to the teaching of the congregations, and to the preservation of the faith.

Dr Amir Malek
On Friday 20th March, the University of Divinity’s 2015 Graduation ceremony was held at the beautiful 19th century, St Michael’s Uniting Church in Collins Street in the city. This year was especially momentous for SACOTC as we celebrated eleven of our students graduating with a Diploma in Theology; more than double the number who graduated last year.

Our 2015 graduates are:
Fr Athanasius Attia
Fr Daniel Ghabrial
Fr Elijah Fanous
Fr Marcos Yassa
Abanob Saad
Abraam Mikhail
Amira Galli
Bishoy Attia
Dina Rofael
Shady Nessim
Stephen Iskander

This year we were honoured that one of our graduates, Stephen Iskander, was asked to read from the scriptures; and the 2015 Vice Chancellor’s Scholar from SACOTC was awarded to Dina Rofael. Dina’s award is a testament to her dedication and love for the study of Theology, but also her genuine commitment and community spirit in engaging with all activities of the SACOTC community. We hope her award encourages other young women to follow in her lead and inspire future female Coptic scholars! To have now graduated a total of fifteen students within the first three years of joining the University of Divinity is an especially significant achievement for us, being one of the smaller colleges, and it is one of which we are particularly delighted. It is particularly pleasing to note that several of our graduates are now pursuing further study in Theology, which highlights how SACOTC is setting the foundations for a lifelong love of study in this important area.

We are incredibly proud of our graduates who have worked so hard to complete their studies alongside other competing demands of family, work, and service. Likewise, we are grateful to the many family and friends who braved a very cold Melbourne night to come out and share in the joy of the graduates, but who also have supported and encouraged them in their journey and supported the College also.

Congratulations to our graduates on your wonderful achievement, we pray that the Lord blesses your lives to go out as living examples of the transformative power of the study of Theology and inspire others to follow your lead.
We warmly welcome Lisa Agaiby, as the College’s first female lecturer. She has developed three fascinating new units which are: Early Egyptian Monasticism; Coptic Art and Archaeology; and Coptic History.

Lisa’s profile follows below: Australian born, Lisa was raised in, and lived most of her life in, Sydney. Between the years 1991 and 2013 she has held various managerial positions in telecommunications companies in Australia, the UK and most recently, the UAE. During these years, Lisa obtained an MA in Egyptology from Macquarie University in Sydney and was instrumental in establishing the MA in Coptic Studies program at Macquarie, which she consequently obtained two years after the launch of the programme.

She gave up corporate life in 2013 to undertake full-time doctoral studies after having been granted a joint PhD scholarship from both Macquarie University and the University of Göttingen in Germany.

Her dissertation is on the history of Antonian settlements in Egypt in Late Antiquity. Lisa has also been involved in various Coptic archaeological fieldwork projects in Egypt, such as at the White Monastery in Sohag, the Baramus Monastery in Wadi al-Natrun, and the Monastery of St Macarius the Great in Wadi al-Natrun.

**Academic Qualifications**
- Bachelor of Arts (Classics & English Literature), University of Newcastle, 1989
- Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing, University of Technology, Sydney, 1993
- Master of Arts in Egyptology, Macquarie University, 2003.
- Master of Arts in Coptic Studies, Macquarie University, 2006.
- Postgraduate Certificate in Research Preparation, Macquarie University, 2009.
- PhD candidate, Macquarie University and the University of Göttingen. Expected completion date: June 2016.

**Major Teaching Areas**
- Early Egyptian Monasticism
- Coptic Archaeology
- Coptic History

**Research Areas**
- Egyptian Monasticism
- Monastic Archaeology

**Publications**
- *The Hermit Fathers*, Sydney, 1993
- *The Life and Sayings of St Antony the Great*, Cairo, 2010
- *Manual Labour as Practiced in Early Egyptian Monasticism from the Late Third to Mid-Fifth Century*, SCS Press, VA, USA (forthcoming)
- “Asceticism and Social Harmony”, in *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte*, 2014

**Previous Teaching Experience**
- Research assistant: Göttingen University, Germany
- Participation in various national and international symposia
- Servant and co-ordinator for Servants Preparation classes in the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney, NSW.
- Youth services in the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney, NSW

Lisa may be contacted at: lagaiby@sacotc.vic.edu.au
The Way of a Pilgrim

If you asked me about seminary two years ago, I would have replied that it wasn’t even on my mind. I was tucked away on the other side of the world, 16,500 kilometres away (yes, we use the metric system in Australia!). I had just finished my physical therapy degree and accepted employment in a private practice. I was set in a comfortable workplace, reporting to honest bosses, and enjoying a supportive environment such as any new graduate would dream of. I was ready to begin my career.

Then everything changed. His Grace Bishop Suriel, dean of St Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College (SACOTC) and bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne, commissioned me to come to St Vladimir’s to study towards a Master of Arts degree. Eight months later, I landed in New York and began the process of making St Vladimir’s my second home, and the adventure began. I’m hoping to complete a Master of Theology here at St Vladimir’s before pursuing doctoral studies. God willing, when I return home, I will work as a lecturer at SACOTC.

I certainly stand out at St Vladimir’s, with my Australian accent and vocabulary, and my need of spellcheck for words like “colour” and “centre.” (Sometimes I deliberately spell them this way, on my papers!) What I’ve found, however, is that I’m not the only one with an unusual background. I’ve discovered that almost everybody here has a story, a unique experience to share, something inspiring to say.

Since I left home in August last year, I have seen God’s hand at work in my life in a far clearer way than ever before. He’s arranged everything, from the simplest of things as my circle of friends, to the numerous travel arrangements. He’s provided academic and spiritual nourishment, reflection for me. Little do they know how their words have echoed in my mind, and stayed with me.

While the whole experience of moving to New York has been an adventure, and living away from home has taught me many things, it is truly the people at St Vladimir’s who have made the experience most memorable. Living in this like-minded community, I’ve been amongst people who have committed their lives to the message of the Gospel. My professors and fellow seminarians alike have given me a new perspective on life, and even the everyday happenings on campus are shaping and sharpening me.

In the classroom, the pressures of academic work have stretched me and the required reading has left me wanting more. Perhaps the most valuable skills I’ve learnt have been methodological. We’ve been taught how to read the Fathers, how to prepare a spiritual reflection on a Biblical text, and how to analyse primary historical documents. I also took a course in Hebrew, which has opened up possibilities of tasting the beauty of the Old Testament in a new way I never knew was possible. This is the real value in formal theological study. It’s not so much the material I’ve learnt; rather, it’s the tools I’ve been given, and will use for the rest of life, to grow in my faith, as I walk the pilgrim’s road to the kingdom of heaven.

Since I left home in August last year, I have seen God’s hand at work in my life in a far clearer way than ever before. He’s arranged everything, from the simplest of things as my circle of friends, to the numerous travel arrangements. He’s provided academic and spiritual nourishment, and even finances, and He’s taken care of my every need. It’s been the journey of a lifetime. I am like the sojourning pilgrim of Russia, travelling where the Lord leads, not knowing the way but holding a steady Hand, trusting in His wisdom and growing in His love.

I’ve been blessed with an opportunity I would not have thought to choose for myself, and I am deeply thankful. Glory to be God in all things!

Abraam Mikhail

Abraam Mikhail is a first year Coptic student in the Master of Arts Program who hails from Melbourne. This May he was invited by Bishop Suriel to attend a conference in Egypt with His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, 118th Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and Patriarch of the See of St Mark. He visited the Monasteries of St Antony the Great and St Paul of Thebes in the Red Sea, as well as that of St Pachomius, near Luxor (Thebes). Abraam was amazed to see the remains of Ancient Egyptian temples — the Karnak Temple and Temple of Luxor — that have been standing tall for thousands of years.

In his leisure time, Abraam enjoys making phone calls back home to Australia, and maintains a patristics blog. He hasn’t posted anything all semester because he was busy doing the required reading for the Patristics survey course and the Origen class; hopefully things will change over the next few weeks!

(This article has been adapted from the story featured at: https://www.svots.edu/voices/seminarians/way-pilgrim)
University of Divinity Promotes His Grace Bishop Suriel to Level C (Senior Lecturer)

In the announcement from the Academic Promotions Panel, Associate Professor Michael Kelly, the Chair of the Panel said,

“We congratulate you on the award of your doctorate from Fordham University in May 2014, and the honour bestowed on you by the University in naming you ‘Unique Graduate of the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education’.

The announcement also emphasised Bishop Suriel’s strengths in two particular areas, namely, leadership and engagement with the churches and the community. The report stated,

“You meet these criteria by being outstanding in leadership at Saint Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College and helping it become the first accredited Coptic Orthodox Theological College in the world, as well as making valuable contributions through research, administration and teaching. However, it is your leadership of the Coptic Orthodox church in Australia which is your most distinctive contribution at a time when the church is experiencing serious persecution.”

Emeritus Professor Paul Beirne Retires from College Council

At our final council meeting of 2014 held on 27th November 2014, Emeritus Professor Paul Beirne sadly advised of his retirement as a member of the council with great regret, due to increasing personal commitments. Paul has been a long-time friend of SACOTC and was in attendance at the opening ceremony of the College on 18th February 2001, at our previous premises in Coburg. He has been a major supporter of our College ever since.

It was in great part due to Paul’s high regard for His Grace Bishop Suriel’s vision of having a fully accredited College, that he made it his mission to see SACOTC join the then Melbourne College of Divinity during his time as Dean of the MCD. We are indebted to Paul for his direction, help, and encouragement to become a member college of what is now the University of Divinity.

His support, however, did not end there. Upon his retirement, after achieving his long held dream of seeing the MCD become Australia’s first specialist University, Paul offered his services to the College and became a member of the College Council in 2013 adding valuable guidance and experience to the council.

The College Council and, indeed, the wider SACOTC community would like to offer its sincere thanks to Emeritus Professor Paul Beirne for his unwavering friendship and support for the College in the many years since we were first established in 2001. We wish him the best of health and success in all of his future endeavours.
By the grace of God, and under the guidance of His Grace Bishop Suriel, we look forward to the opening of the city campus in Eporo Tower in 2017.

The new campus in the heart of the Melbourne CBD is purpose built with the following facilities, all supported by the latest technology:

- Four lecture theatres, each seating 35 students. These lecture theatres can be opened up and combined to allow seating for 140 students.
- Offices and staff rooms
- Conference facilities
- Library

This further realises the objectives of His Grace to enhance theological education in the Diocese and to open the Theological College to the wider community.

We ask for your prayers and support for the successful completion of this project.

Second Campus at Eporo Tower