



# A Time to Heal

## Ecclesiastes 3:3

This article was written by Father Pishoy Salama.



The church is the house of the angels and the dwelling place of God. Indeed, in the dedication of the temple, Solomon said, **“I have surely built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever” (1Kgs 8:13)**. Also, Psalm 84 tells us that David the prophet longed to be present in the house of the Lord to praise Him and to behold His glory. There is no doubt in my mind that we should constantly remind our youth to honor and respect God’s house by dressing appropriately, refraining from side discussions during the Liturgy, prostrating respectfully in front of the altar, and using their time at church exclusively to praise and worship our Lord. Yet, as an adult, I have learned not to jump to conclusions whenever I observe one of our youth behaving in a way that may seem to contradict the guidelines for attending church.

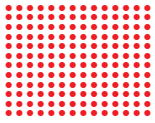
Shortly after my ordination, I noticed a youth who was wearing a baseball cap during the entire Divine Liturgy. I had never seen this individual before, but thought to myself that it was extremely disrespectful for someone to behave in such a manner during church. After the

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liturgy I took it upon myself to go and make it clear to him that his action was unacceptable. As soon as I reached him I said, “Do you not know that you are not allowed to wear a hat during church?” and I immediately removed it, exposing his head. To my astonishment and shame, I noticed that the boy had lost all his hair and was completely bald. I immediately inquired from his mother, who stood beside him in surprise, as to the reason for the boy’s hair loss. She explained to me that he was a Leukemia patient and that he was being treated at The Hospital for Sick Children. I was very sorry for my behavior and for embarrassing the teen in front of everyone.

Our Lord Jesus modeled the extreme example of patience and understanding for us. He was never quick to judge; neither did He offend people for the way they dressed, behaved, nor acted, even though He knew that they were living sinful lives. The Lord knew that these individuals were not necessarily evil but rather they had not yet tasted the joy of living a righteous life. Instead, all they needed was someone to kindly show them God’s way without judging, condemning, or labeling them. How amazingly strong it was for the Lord to stand in front of the scribes and Pharisees to defend the woman convicted of adultery and say, **“He who is without sin**



among you let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). He then whispered in her ear saying, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (11).

As for the Samaritan woman, the Lord was able to guide her towards the kingdom by addressing her concerns in a gentle and respectful manner. He made her thirst for the living water that He offered until she freely confessed her unethical lifestyle. The Lord then commended her for her honest answer (John 4:17). This woman's life was later transformed, as she became the first preacher to the Samaritans (29). This is truly the God whom we worship; He is the friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19); and He is the one who desires mercy and not sacrifice. (Matt 9:13).



Beloved, I have had numerous conversations about this subject with youth and members of the church who were baptized as adults, and most of them have conveyed the same concerns. We often ask ourselves why youth end up abandoning the church after turning eighteen years old or sometimes even before that age. Well, there are certainly several reasons that might contribute to this decision, one of which is that we are not able to bear their weaknesses and model for them the way that Christ dealt with sinners. There are several stories and examples that we can provide to portray the struggles that our young people may face including embarrassments about dressing, behaving in Sunday school or lack of respect to

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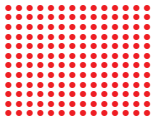
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church. Also, the looks which some members of the church who were baptized as adults receive as they enter into church which might, intentionally or non-intentionally, suggest, "What are you doing here? This is not your church!"

Our Lord Jesus portrayed the utmost respect to the house of God and proclaims that **it was a house of prayer (Mark 11: 17)**. It is my responsibility as a Father to discuss these issues, which affect the future of our church in the twenty first century and beyond. In writing this article, it was never my intention to condemn or to criticize any individuals, customs, or traditions. In fact, I have the greatest respect and admiration for all the individuals in our community who have proven themselves in the land of immigration through their toils, struggles, and spiritual commitment. Also, I believe that the majority of people have already made this mental adjustment and are dealing with these issues in wisdom and spirituality. It is possibly the actions of the few that are magnified and cause speculation. I am also keeping in mind the words of our Lord to first remove the plank from my own eyes (Luke 6:42).

Beloved, we now live in a post-modern world, which has its arms spread wide-open in an attempt to incorporate and absorb our children and youth in it, with little or no judgment on their appearance or behavior. As a matter of fact, the world encourages and promotes behavior that portrays signs of individuality and selfishness. For this reason, St. John said, "**Do not love the world or the things in the world**" (1 John 2:15, 16).





The world does not care for the consequences of one's actions but lays the temptations and once the people commit the sin, it turns away and leaves the blame on them. Yet, the acceptance and love offered in the church is different. It is the true love from the heart, which is commanded by the Lord as necessary to convert a heart to God's true knowledge and commitment. It is time to distinguish and differentiate the means from the goal; that is to say that it has always been the goal of any individual who is zealous for the Lord to lead souls into repentance and a true fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We must now rethink the means that are not only acceptable to this generation, but that model for them true Christian behavior and omit any stumbling blocks coming from individuals in the church. Embarrassment, yelling public criticism, quick judgment, or condemnation will never bring any results or turning of hearts in this generation. In fact, they yield the exact opposite results and push away people. Love, respect, patience, active listening, dialoguing, and most importantly prayer, is what helps our children

and youth to reach God and correct their ways. When they are approached appropriately, then their reaction will be encouraging and they can have a change of heart.

It has been a few years since the story of the young man, mentioned in the beginning of this article, occurred and the boy has now long passed away to heaven. I often sit down and wonder what if I had the same chance all over again? What would I do differently this time around? I pray that the Lord would give me, and you, the beloved reader, a compassionate and a kind heart towards this generation of children and youth, who live in a broken world, so that together, we can announce that this is indeed "A Time to Heal."

I pray that all hearts may be healed by the power of the Holy Spirit; through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos St. Mary, St. Mark the apostle, and the prayers of H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

Amen.

