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**Self-Ruled**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH  
*Diocese of Los Angeles and the West*

February 1, 2010

Beloved in Christ:

Greetings and blessings in the Name of our Lord.

In 2005, the same year that I proclaimed a "Year of the Youth," I gave my blessing to a developing work being undertaken by the faithful at St. Athanasius Church in Goleta, California. Under the direction of the Father Nicholas Speier, several religious education volunteers and their director began implementing a Montessori-based program known as the "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd," adapted for Orthodox usage.

From my meetings with Father Nicholas and these catechists, I know that great care has been taken throughout this process to ensure that the content of this program reflects the Holy Orthodox Faith. This Catechesis is very compatible with Orthodox living and worship because it brings the whole body into the learning process, and encourages prayerfulness in the presentation of new information. The catechists describe it as a religious education experience that is deep, compelling, and transformative for both the children and themselves. These children are coming to know the person of Christ, His presence in the Eucharist, and the history of God's gifts in a way that is vibrant and alive. Many people have observed how their appreciation of—and participation in—the liturgical life of the Church is growing.

Therefore, it is with great joy that I offer my blessing and approval for the continued development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. I encourage the catechists of St. Athanasius to share this good gift with the greater Church community through their assistance and trainings, and encourage others who desire to learn more about this program to "come and see" the work they are doing at St. Athanasius.

Yours in Christ,

**+ JOSEPH**

*Bishop of Los Angeles and the West*

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