The Holy Cross Chapel sits atop the highest point of the Hellenic College Holy Cross campus. Its Byzantine style is reflective of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and is modeled after the Church of the Holy Apostles. Over the horizon is a clear view of the Boston skyline. A Great Vespers service is being chanted in memory of the Holy Great Martyr St. Theodore the General, with a procession of his holy relics.

Lauren Maalouf from St. Nicholas Church in Los Angeles, a fourth-year student of Elementary Education, attends the evening service. Serving is Father Phillip Begley from Sioux City, Iowa, who is completing his Master of Divinity degree at Holy Cross Greek School of Theology. Today the hillside chapel is packed. Bishop JOHN (Abdalalah) of the Diocese of Worcester and New England is serving, and the Antiochian community on campus is excited to welcome him.

“Serving at the school chapel was a great joy for me,” says Bishop JOHN. “All of the faculty and students were most welcoming and prayerful. The
chapel is exceptionally beautiful and I have many fond memories of praying there when I was young. We are blessed to share common goals and Orthodox life with the instructors and students of the varied jurisdictions represented at Hellenic College Holy Cross.”

Over 13 Orthodox Christian jurisdictions make up the academic student body at Hellenic College Holy Cross. Currently, almost ten percent of the students are from the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. What started seventy-five years ago as a seminary for the Greek Orthodox community has grown into a Church institution of higher learning serving all Orthodox Christian jurisdictions, and providing accredited degree programs in divinity, theology, professional studies and the liberal arts, while still functioning as a seminary.

“One of the beautiful themes we like to stress in Orthodoxy is unity in diversity,” notes Deacon Nicholas Belcher, Dean of Students at HCHC. “Here at Hellenic College Holy Cross, the Antiochian students witness to the unique way we live the one Orthodox Faith. All of the students come together to form a diverse and caring community.”

Holy Cross is one of the four seminaries to which the Antiochian Archdiocese assigns seminarians. His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP matches students to these seminaries. Bishop JOHN says, “We are blessed to have Holy Cross Seminary, St. Vladimir’s Seminary and St. Tikhon’s, as well as the St. John of Damascus Theological Institute at The Balamand. All four institutions are great places and do good work.”

Lauren, who hopes to teach in her home state of California, chose HCHC to grow in her faith while earning her degree. “HCHC appealed to me first and foremost because I thought it was very important to incorporate my faith into my everyday life. I was very excited not only to be learning more about my faith, but to be living and interacting with like-minded Orthodox Christians.”

She is excited to have His Grace Bishop JOHN, the new Bishop in residence, in the area and in close proximity to the school. “It is always a blessing when any hierarch is able to visit our campus, especially from the Antiochian Archdiocese. I pray that he will be a constant resource for all the students at HCHC and always keep us in his prayers.”

Bishop JOHN has already created a great sense of community and family among the Antiochian students and seminarians. Not only has he served as an excellent resource, but he has proven to be a very gracious host. On Super Bowl Sunday, Bishop JOHN invited the Antiochian seminarians to his home to watch the game. Taking a break from dormitory and campus living to enjoy the game at his home was a great comfort.

Father Phillip, who is in his third year, says, “His Grace lives so close. He is always available to help us with any questions or concerns we may have. When His Grace attended Great Vespers, all of the Antiochian clergy served. It was a wonderful experience!”

Dn. Nicholas believes that Bishop JOHN’s presence will have a profound impact on the Antiochian students. “Having Bishop JOHN so close by allows us to form a very familial relationship that will help in the transformation of our students into the future clergy and lay leaders of our Archdiocese.”

Bishop JOHN sees HCHC as appealing to seminarians because of the number of churches in the area. Each of the 11 churches and missions in the Diocese of Worcester and New England has clergy and staff that offer seminarians a continued education out of the classroom, and provide college students opportunities for service, fellowship, and worship.

“We put the students to work in the parishes,” Bishop JOHN remarks. “Both parishes and students benefit from these opportunities. We try to have the students assigned to different parishes, affording them a variety of experiences and opportunities.”

Fr. Ed Hughes, who is the Dean of the Diocese parishes, teaches practical theology, liturgical practice and Arabic at HCHC. He also provides weekly mentoring to HCHC seminarians. All the diocesan priests support the students by hearing confessions, counseling and mentoring.

“We have been welcomed by His Eminence Archbishop DEMETRIOS and the President, Fr. Nicholas Triantafilou, to be integral parts of the community. They have entrusted me – an Antiochian deacon – to be the Dean of Students. Both our graduate and undergraduate students are in key roles of student leadership, including in the altar and chanter stand in the chapel. Hellenic College Holy Cross is a great place to be an Antiochian,” Dn. Nicholas says.

Nayla Daly