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ORTHODOX COFFEE SHOP OPENS IN OREGON



Bend, Oregon, 160 miles southeast of Portland, is home to about 97,000 people, as well as the St. Jacob of Alaska Orthodox Church of the Orthodox Church in America.

Now the residents and visitors of Bend will be able to learn more about holy Orthodoxy while enjoying some high quality coffee, with the opening of the Agia Sophia Coffeehouse and Bookstore.



The new shop began when Fr. Damian Kuolt of St. Jacob's Church took over the property that was formerly The Open Book, a popular Bend bookstore since 1984. The new business combines a café in the front half of the store, with walls lined with books, and a back room that will serve as space for book clubs and overstock storage, Fr. Damian recently told the Bend Bulletin.

Maintaining much of the stock from The Open Book, Agia Sophia will offer literary selections focused on philosophy, history, culture, world religions, and ancient Christianity, specializing in affordable used books.

"It's surprising, the number of people who come in and they read voraciously. And it's a thrill, because every day somebody comes in and they can't find a book (elsewhere). Yesterday we had two great finds in our classic literature," Fr. Damian said.

"Our purpose is, to quote Christ, love your neighbor as yourself," he said. "And my neighbor is every person that I meet. And if I have a little hidden chapel behind the building over at the Whistle Stop (Business Center), I'm not going to meet anybody. We're here to serve. The life of a Christian is meant to serve the people around them. And we just thought it was a great way to serve the community—keep the bookstore open."

Agia Sophia's mission is to serve the community by providing a unique place where people can:

- enjoy the best coffee, tea, warm and cold drinks with tantalizing 'eats and treats';
- just hang out in a warm, inviting atmosphere built around coffee and books, with an "Eastern Christian Ethos" – that 'subtle something' that warms the heart;
- engage in casual conversations and contemplation, enjoy our curated collection of new used books;
- discover timeless wisdom through our collection of the Classics of Literature, Religion, Philosophy, History, the Arts, and local favorites.

As Fr. Damian explained to the Bend Bulletin, the new coffeehouse is the third in a line of loosely-affiliated Agia Sophia shops, the original having operated in Colorado Springs for 12 years, and a second in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania having operated for several years. In fact, the Bend location inherited much of its equipment and furniture from the Colorado shop.

Agia Sophia is a nonprofit. "To get launched it's part of an extension of our parish, but we're going to run this as an unrelated business," Kuolt said. "It will be a business to serve the community."

Fr. Damian, who moved with his wife Joanna and four children to Bend to help develop St. Jacob's Church, intends to hold events such as readings and lectures at the new Bend location as well.

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