

Fall 2018

Jacob's well

Orthodox Church in America • Diocese of New York and New Jersey

*Our Firm Foundation,
Our Refuge, and
Our Deliverer*



Jacob's Well

Fall 2018



*"Give me this water,
that I may not thirst . . ."*
John 4:15

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Our Firm Foundation, Our Refuge, and Our Deliverer

by Fr. John Shimchick

Last summer during a gathering of Doctor of Ministry students at St. Vladimir's Seminary I met Nathan Hoppe, an OCMC missionary to Albania. In reviewing his experiences, we discussed what he was considering for his program's final project. He wanted to explore: How is it possible to revitalize or build a Church community whose foundation had been destroyed? It would seem, I proposed, that many of us, even in more traditional settings, are trying to do something similar — it's just that we are working on renewing or even creating a foundation under an existing building. Online conversations often consider this as one of the most difficult building projects, but as was suggested: "If the house is worth anything, then it makes sense to do a proper foundation" (*The Journal of Light Construction*).

Taking the line from Psalm 18:2 — offered by the clergy before the singing of the Creed at the Liturgy — we want to affirm in this issue that: Our house is worth the effort and that Jesus Christ is the only foundation (1 Cor 3:11), our refuge, and our deliverer. We appreciate the thematic contributions of Fr. Lawrence Farley, the staff of the *International Orthodox Christian Charities* (IOCC), and Nathan Hoppe. We are also grateful for the beautiful images of the monasteries located on the rock formations of Meteora in central Greece (shared by a friend).

We feature numerous events that have taken place in our Diocese over the past several years (including this past summer's All-American Council in St. Louis), the celebration of Carol Wetmore's 50 years as choir director at Holy Trinity Church, Randolph, and consider the efforts taking place in various missions. We highlight Archbishop Michael's trips to the Holy Land and Slovakia (where he was able to participate in the consecration of a church built with Diocesan financial support). Our Special Features include: a review of the documentary — *Becoming Truly Human* — which focuses on ministry to the "nones" (those unaffiliated with any organized religion); a conversation between Benedict Sheehan and Robin Freeman on the question of whether there is a "musical crisis in the Orthodox Church"; and an Advent talk given by Dr. Mary Farag.

We acknowledge the faithful ministries of Fr. Paul and Mary Shafra (70th anniversary of marriage

and priesthood); Fr. Paul and Barbara Kucynda (50th anniversary of marriage and priesthood) and note with sadness the falling asleep of Barbara Kucynda, and of Frs. Steven Mack and John Nehrebecki. We also mark with admiration the ministry and note the retirement of Fr. Steven Belonick, who with his wife, Deborah, served as the original editors of *Jacob's Well*. Their efforts were continued by Deacon Peter Danilchick and Mary Ann Bulko, and I assumed the position in the Fall of 1990.

Jacob's Well, as intended by Fr. Steven and Deborah, was meant to serve — like the site mentioned in the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) — as a place for the public gathering and distribution of news and, in particular, as a means for reflection on the living encounter with Jesus Christ.



In appreciation for their vision and with much love for their long friendship, encouragement, and spiritual insights — this last issue I will edit, is dedicated to them.

I am grateful as well to all those who have shared their voices and contributions over the years, especially to Fr. Stephen Siniari who has written for every issue (beginning with his "Mission Diary.") Lee Ann Vozdovic has been wonderful to work with as our graphic designer. Finally, Fr. Matthew Brown, will become the new editor and I am encouraged by his energy and creativity.

This issue began with an encounter and the realization of the need to build on a firm foundation. It will end as well, for me, with this same realization. In that sense, over the past 28 years, each issue — no matter what it was entitled — has had the same theme.

Jacob's Well

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Making the Gospel Good News Again

by Archbishop Michael

For many, going to church is bad news. They are reminded of all that is wrong in our world by the lack of love from their fellow parishioners. What they hear preached seems to be just more railing about how bad the world is or how bad they are. It is difficult in such an environment to motivate yourself to attend the divine services, let alone commit yourself to a parish.

The gospel of Christ is not a message about how bad the world is, but how good it can be. It is not a message about the brokenness of the world, but its redemption, its transfiguration. The life of our parishes, the content of our preaching must be Good News to the ears. Active participation in the life of

God intended. But too often we are like the Pharisees who "...bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (Matt. 23:4). What we demand of others must not exceed our own charity and readiness to share that burden with them in co-suffering love. Our gospel is not about laying more burdens on men, but helping them carry what they have. Each has his own cross to bear, some heavier than others, but we are all called to be like Simon of Cyrene.

"Do not imagine it a victory, holy Sopotros, to have denounced an opinion, which apparently is not good. ..." In this letter from Saint Dionysius to a priest, the saint steers the clergyman away from his preoccupation with the untruth others say, pointing out that it is far safer to focus on what is true and good. Merely because a man has shown his opponent to be wrong does not make him necessarily right. Rather, the saint advises him to do the following: "...cease to speak against others, but rather speak on behalf of truth, that everything said is altogether unquestionable" (St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Letter VI to Sopotros*). Our identity is not in what we are opposed to, but in what we stand for. We don't preach against something, we preach for something. We have good news to proclaim. Our identity is in what Christ taught us and has done for us, not in the horrible things others are doing. What then is the content of this good news of ours?



Archbishop Michael at SS. Peter and Paul Church, Bodružal, Slovakia.

Church must, if we expect our parishes to grow, measurably improve the lives of its people. It must bring inspiration, hope, consolation, and strength to those who hear of it and see it and to those who live it.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Our parishes are filled with those who carry burdens too heavy for them; they are worn down, broken, and wounded. Who would see a doctor that only tells them how bad their disease is? No one. We want a doctor who can tell us of a cure. We need to preach the cure.

We want the people to come not out of guilt, or mere duty, or force of habit, but in hope. We want them to believe that life in the Church improves their lives, transforms them, and allows them to flourish as

The content of the Good News is hope. Hope is essential for human life and wellbeing. Without hope that better things will come, that the evil and suffering that has occurred will be conquered and redeemed, man slips into despair. Because without hope life loses its vitality, its meaningfulness, and becomes hard to endure. We need hope to get up out of bed each morning and to withstand the hard tasks ahead of us (and the hard people we will encounter). We have no greater hope than in the gospel of Christ.

Not only are we promised a future age of delight where there is neither sighing nor sorrow, and life unending, but we are promised unspeakable foretastes in this life, as witnessed to by our saints. We have hope that we can conquer our bad habits; we can attain great heights in prayer; we can be forgiven; even of that

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No Other Foundation: Building an Orthodox Parish

by Fr. Lawrence Farley

A large part of the problem with some Orthodox parishes (at least of my acquaintance) is not lack of money or lack of a nice building (nice as money and good buildings are), but the fact that they have not been built upon a proper foundation. The Scriptures have lots to say about the value of a good foundation, and the Lord teaches us that if the foundation has not been properly laid, the whole edifice built upon it is in danger of being swept away (Matthew 7:24-27), if not literally, then certainly spiritually. I know of a number of parishes which have been thus swept away—not that they no longer exist as parishes, but that they no longer exist as true temples of God. Some have become spiritually toxic, and are more accurately described as synagogues of Satan (compare Revelation 2:9). To be a truly Orthodox temple of God, the community must first have in place a solid foundation. And as St. Paul reminds us, “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). One can try to lay other foundations, setting in place the wood, hay, and straw foundations of ego and the cult of personality. But Jesus Christ is the only real and lasting foundation, either for a parish or an individual’s life.

That foundation can also be described as “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20)—i.e. a foundation consisting of the apostles’ teaching and the prophets’ spiritual gifts (the term “prophet” in Ephesians refers to the Christian prophets such as Agabus of Acts 21:10, not the prophets of the Old Testament), because life in Christ is built upon adherence to apostolic tradition and access to spiritual power. And this apostolic tradition is not some vague generality, but contains specifics which must be believed—Hebrews 6:1-2 speaks of “a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” We are not free to believe whatever we want or to pick and choose from among options. The apostolic foundation consists of a body of teaching which must be accepted as one integral whole.

But building upon Jesus Christ consists of more than simply accepting certain doctrines. It

also involves living them out in our relationships. I would like to elaborate on five aspects of this.

First of all, the priest must dedicate himself to his people and to washing their feet, as the Lord Himself gave both example and command (John 13:1f.). Too often young priests assume they are entitled to respect simply because they wear a cassock. It is true that all persons should be treated with respect and courtesy, but it is also true that respect must be earned. The priest’s ordination does not entitle him to respect so much as it gives him the opportunity among his people to earn it. And he earns it by selflessly serving them, counselling them, loving them, weeping with them, sharing their burdens, and being accessible to them at all times. By doing so he earns credibility, so that he will be cut some slack when he errs or makes unpopular decisions. But it takes time to earn such credibility, as some young clergy have learned to their cost.



Secondly, the priest must preach Jesus Christ, and nothing else. What else, you may ask, would a priest preach? Alas, there is a long list of possible alternatives. He might preach simple moralism (“Let us be loving and nice”); he might preach the glories of his ethnic heritage. I remember a Greek bishop enthusing at a church’s dedication about “our beautiful religion,” by which he almost certainly meant his beautiful Greek religion. Better to enthuse about our beautiful Saviour, for to enthuse about our religion is another way of enthusing about ourselves. And one might preach Orthodoxy—the subtlest of all snares. That is, one might describe the glories of the Orthodox Faith, its sound doctrines, its wonderful sacraments, its glorious icons—and how Orthodoxy is a superior faith to all the other faiths on the market.

In other words, one might preach about our beautiful religion, shorn of its ethnic components, which is still a way of preaching ourselves. The apostles preached Jesus Christ as Lord, God, and Saviour, and how one could live in obedience to Him and become transformed. Orthodoxy is not the content of our Faith, but the mode of its reception. We serve the Christ preached by the Orthodox, not the Christ preached by (say) the Mormons. But Christ remains the content of our preaching.

Thirdly, the parish council must be united in standing behind and supporting their priest. Too often parish councils become the sites of a tug of war, a struggle for power, with the priest pulling in one direction and his council pulling in the other. In this struggle, no one wins, especially not the supposed winner. The council must have the same goal as the priest—i.e. not to collect and retain power, but to serve Christ and His flock, and they must support their priest because he is in the forefront of fulfilling this common goal. He is not their employee, but their papa, and should be treated as such.

Fourthly, the community must make love their aim—that is, the creation of genuine community. This is impossible to do without eating together and working together, and to this end all Sunday Liturgies must have a time of eating appended to it so that the people can eat, talk, and share together. All the Pauline epistles presuppose the presence of a close community, and without it Christianity remains a mere cultic experience, lacking its crucial social component. One church I knew of always had a meal afterward, but they charged for the food, so that the social time functioned as a fundraiser. Not surprisingly many skipped this meal and left right after the Liturgy, especially those with large families who could not afford to pay \$10 a head for perogies and borscht. When I suggested that they have a free pot-luck meal instead, they were aghast at the possible loss to their budget. They valued income over the creation of community—and over church growth. They have their reward.

Finally, the community must be eschatologically oriented. That is, they must regard themselves not

primarily as citizens of this world or as Americans or Canadians or as citizens of any other country, but as citizens of the Kingdom. Patriotism is wonderful, but the good must not be allowed to become the enemy of the best, and the Church stands under the Cross, not under any national flag. To make the flag paramount is idolatrous. Through his preaching the priest must encourage his flock to see themselves as sojourners in this age, with their eyes fixed on the horizon to behold the blessed hope of the Second Coming with the cry of “Maranatha!” in their hearts. Living this out consistently will mean that the society around them

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will increasingly regard them as aliens, as unwelcome intruders, and as disturbers of the secular status quo. We all know where the front line of this battle is being drawn, and we must not flinch or compromise. Our Lord's words to the apostles, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19)

have lost none of their relevance. The priest must preach and the people must accept that to become an Orthodox Christian is to leave one moral universe and to enter a different one. And they must read the fine print before making this decision—that of inevitable conflict with the world and of possible persecution.

These are the principles and the foundation upon which new missions should be built and already established churches should conform. Conforming to them does not require changes in the congregation's constitution and bylaws, but only humility of heart and a desire to grow. In the end it comes down to vision: does one have a vision of one's church as a place of counter-cultural transforming truth and a laboratory of love, or simply as a place to go to in order to fulfil one's spiritual needs? If the latter, then you should know that God cares less than nothing about your spiritual needs. He cares about you and your transformation. And that transformation is only possible if you catch the vision of your church as a place of uncomfortable truth, and of healing love.

Fr. Lawrence is the pastor of St. Herman of Alaska Church, Langley, British Columbia, Canada.

Building on the Foundation of Christ: Building Blocks of Service

*“Nothing can so make a man an imitator of
Christ as caring for his neighbor.” – St. John Chrysostom*

There is one Lord, one foundation, and that is Christ. Each Christian, St. Paul teaches, will be accountable for what he has done, for what he has built upon that foundation (1 Cor. 3:11–12). The quality and durability of each one’s contribution to the Kingdom of God will ultimately be revealed. So what does it look like to build on that foundation in a way that’s pleasing to the Lord?

St. Paul also teaches that each member of Christ’s Body has talents, gifts from the Holy Spirit: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Cor. 12:4–6). The Church Fathers teach that when Christians give, God considers not the amount or commercial value but the spirit in which it is given, or “the greatness of the affection with which it is offered,” in St. John Chrysostom’s words. Each one of us, no matter his or her circumstances, can find something to give, whether it is a cup of water in Jesus’ name or some other kindness, large or small.

Every Christian, then, has a role to play in building up the Church. Further, Christ Himself offers guidance for what that work should be: we serve Him when we serve others. The parable of the Last Judgment vividly illustrates what that service looks like: “For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matt. 25:35–36). And this particular call to service in the Gospel is what guides the work of *International Orthodox Christian Charities* (IOCC).

As the official humanitarian agency under the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, IOCC works to fulfill this Scripture, building on the foundation of Christ in several ways. First, IOCC’s mission is to serve those in need without discrimination. Christ’s teachings and ministry demonstrate that human beings are not to judge one another but rather to serve one another for Christ’s sake, regardless of language, creed, ethnicity,

or any other potential dividing line. He Himself served, healed, and taught Romans, Samaritans, and Jews alike, dining with rich and poor, society’s leaders and its outcasts. The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan makes a Samaritan man—a member of a clan at enmity with the Jews—an example for Christ’s followers to emulate. What should we emulate? The Samaritan’s compassion and humanity; the fact that he saw not an enemy, but a fellow human being in need and went out of his way to help him.

Second, IOCC endeavors to strengthen Christ’s Orthodox Church, expanding its ability to serve those in need both globally and locally. Around the world, IOCC partners with community organizations and Orthodox churches to facilitate the delivery of relief and humanitarian assistance. Here in the United States, IOCC has been instrumental in training Frontliners to provide spiritual and emotional care in the wake of disasters, as well as offering the *Orthodox Homefront*, a program through which parishes prepare to be centers of assistance in their communities in the event of a natural or manmade disaster.

Finally, IOCC offers Orthodox Christians in the United States a channel through which to engage in Christian service, each one making their own contribution to building on the foundation of Christ. Those who support IOCC’s work include hierarchs, youth and retired persons, priests, and laypeople—individuals, parishes, and organizations that see the value in the service IOCC offers: emergency response, education, job opportunities, and so much more.

In addition, each person or group who participates in IOCC’s work, whether by volunteering, donating time or money, or simply sharing a story with a friend, is answering Christ’s call to serve those in need—in



Ancient Foundations and New Beginnings: Building the Church in Post-Communist Albania

by Nathan Hoppe

The resurrection of the Orthodox Church in Albania over the past 25 years, under the leadership of Archbishop Anastasios, is one of the most inspiring stories in the modern Church. In 1991, Albania was the only place in the world where all religious practice was illegal. The Church had been persecuted from the time that the Communist government under Enver Hoxha came to power in November, 1944. In 1967, after systematically persecuting, undermining, and

as patriarchal exarch to investigate what was left in Albania. What he found was a Church whose structures had been totally devastated, but contained many people who had kept faith secretly and who were eager for catechism, baptism, and renewal. At the insistence of the people of Albania he was elected as the Archbishop of Tirana, reestablishing its structure as an Autocephalous Church.

This was a new beginning in the history of an ancient Church. The Gospel was preached in Albania very early with a bishop established in the city of Durrës by the end of the first century. According to some traditions the Apostle Paul himself may have worked here. The history of the Church in Albania has been rich and complicated. Over the centuries the geographical region that is now Albania passed between different empires and ecclesial jurisdictions.

The resurrection of the Orthodox Church of Albania has been spectacular. In a place where there were no functioning church buildings in 1991, there are now 370 Orthodox churches. Of these, 150 are newly built, 60 are repaired, 160 are restored, and 160 clergy have been trained and ordained. The Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania has been reestablished. The Church also has numerous initiatives in healthcare, education, and development.

When Archbishop Anastasios was elected and enthroned, he had no assured sources of income. Because of his international stature and the great respect that so many have for him he has been able to raise a great deal of financial support. In the early 90s Albania had virtually no functioning economy following the complete collapse of the failed government. The Archbishop and the fledgling Church were dependent for everything on the generosity of donors from outside Albania. Generous support from Greece and other countries flowed in, providing necessary funding for its daily operating expenses and the rebuilding of the infrastructure.

These spectacular achievements under his leadership only tell part of the story. The greater challenge and achievements have involved the reigniting of the



Nathan Hoppe with Archbishop Anastasios

infiltrating the Church for 23 years, the government took the unprecedented step of declaring all religion illegal and disbanding all religious institutions. All Church properties were nationalized, all clergy were forced to stop serving, and all of the remaining bishops died during the following years of total persecution. Church buildings were destroyed or converted for other uses (such as barns for animals). There was a systematic effort to degrade the image of the Church and all religion in the eyes of the people. It became impossible for parents to teach children about their Orthodox faith because they were regularly questioned at school regarding practices at home.

In 1991, the Communist totalitarian state collapsed and religious freedom returned. Archbishop Anastasios was sent by the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Our Firm Foundation, Our Refuge, and Our Deliverer

Orthodox faith in the hearts of the Albanian people. Authentic Orthodox Christian life cannot be mass produced. Our Lord spent years with His disciples, forming, and teaching them to be conformed to His image. In each successive generation this Holy Tradition, which is life in Christ, has been handed over from one generation to the next in the context of authentic relationships of love and trust. The word Tradition means that which is “handed over.” In the case of Christian Tradition, this is not an abstract system of doctrine or a code of laws, though it does contain doctrine and law – it is primarily a living relationship with Christ. One person who has deep experience of life in Christ introduces another person to Him and guides that person in the way of discipleship.

In Albania during the years of persecution this process of transmitting the Tradition was interrupted. With very few exceptions it was not possible for one generation to teach and disciple the next as followers of Christ. Amazingly, many Albanians preserved their sense of Orthodox Christian identity through the persecution, but most of them had little knowledge or understanding of their faith. It must be remembered that they were suffering the effects of not only the years of Communist persecution, but also almost five centuries of Islamic persecution during the Ottoman occupation. During Ottoman rule, churches were allowed to exist, but under constant pressure approximately 70% of Albanians converted to Islam.

On his arrival in 1991, Archbishop Anastasios gathered the handful of surviving clergy (less than 20) and others who had preserved their Orthodox Faith and began to work with them to organize the life of the Church and teach the Orthodox Faith. In February 1992, he established the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy to begin training a new generation of clergy. The Archbishop, together with a few missionaries, began to teach the Holy Tradition to a group of men who were then ordained to go out and celebrate the services and teach the faith.

To reestablish the life of the Church it was necessary not only to celebrate liturgies, catechize, and baptize people, but also to reestablish local Eucharistic communities. The Church is not a vending machine for Sacraments, it is the Body of Christ manifested in each place where a group of people are united to Him and one another in the Eucharist. It is difficult to imagine the challenge faced by new clergy in Albania in the early 90s. They had grown up in a place where,

not only had they never been to church, they had never seen a church for most of their lives. They were sent to pastor congregations of people who also had grown up never having seen a church. There were a few who remembered churches from their childhood before these had all been closed. But even those were congregations under persecution, where authentic community life was not possible.

During this time of challenge, the Albanian Church has particularly needed people with a firm grounding in the Holy Tradition of Orthodoxy who would come and incarnate this Faith in the Albanian language and culture. There are more than 600,000 people whose parents or grandparents were Orthodox before the persecution who now need someone to reach and disciple them. In addition, there are two million people who are not Christians and have never heard the Gospel in a way that they could fully understand or that would enable them to respond to Christ. Discipleship is a process of multiplication that develops slowly when the initial numbers are small.

The story in Albania continues. God has worked a miracle in the resurrection of the Church under the inspired leadership of Archbishop Anastasio. But this is an act of incredible grace, in spite of the failure of Orthodox Christians around the world to take seriously Christ’s commandment to make disciples of all nations. There is still a tremendous need for people to come to Albania and help us with the ongoing work. There are also many places in the world where the work of building the Church has not yet begun. As Orthodox Christians in North America we have been blessed with tremendous resources. The question before us is how are we going to use it to build His Church?

Nathan Hoppe is a missionary to Albania with the OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center).

See also: Jim Forest, *The Resurrection of the Church in Albania.*

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Making the Gospel Good News Again

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thing for which we cannot forgive ourselves. We have hope that our relationships can improve, that we can be transfigured into men and women of virtue.

We must preach this hope. Our churches must be places of this hope, of belief in the triumph of good; believe that people can change, where even the most dysfunctional and wayward can find healing and wholeness. They must be places where even if one member does not have hope, the community has hope for them – in the good things God has prepared for them. “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

The content of Good News is peace. Jesus preached extensively about worry and anxiety – and the peace He offered in its place. Peace is also what He offers in place of conflict and strife. We are promised that it is possible to live without anxiety and in harmony with all things.

In our parishes we must strive for this peace and make them places of refuge. Jesus shows us the path to having peace instead of conflict and anxiety. He shows us that being the suffering servant, turning the other cheek, repaying evil with good, forgiving seventy times seven, abstaining from violence, and having humility, is how to defeat strife.

“To pluck a flower means to take possession of it, and it also means to kill it” (Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*). For anxiety, we are taught non-possessiveness. When we stop trying to possess

things, the future, control over our lives, material objects, security, and other people, we find freedom and peace. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). Jesus lived this non-possessiveness and non-violence. He voluntarily endured His Passion and He lived as a wandering vagabond, without a home and without money. Yet, He had an abundance of peace to give. He was not afraid. We also can live unafraid and at peace.

The content of Good News is love: We all need a place to belong, and a people to call our own. We all desire to be known by others, to share in other’s joys and sorrows, to love and be loved. God is love and we are told by Him that “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Are our parishes communities of love that accept and welcome those society has cast aside? Do we love merely in words, or do we sacrifice for one another? Is there a cost to our love? Our communities can be an antidote to the hate, self-interest, and divisions that pervade our society. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that” (Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope*).

We must preach love, and peace, and hope. We must become this good news incarnate. This is what the people of the world are thirsty for. It is what all men and women desire. These are universal yearnings of the human heart and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news to those who yearn. Our Church must be the home for all those who seek Him, who is love, and peace, and hope incarnate.

Building on the Foundation of Christ:

Building Blocks of Service

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ways large and small, each giving of God’s gifts. The dedication and generosity of ordinary Christians is what undergirds IOCC as an organization, and IOCC relies on that parish-level engagement to continue serving those in need around the globe. For Christians, giving what we can in service to others is the way we can ultimately serve Christ Himself. That is how we are able to build upon the foundation of faith granted to us and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to become, by His grace, more like Him.

IOCC is the humanitarian agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC has provided more than \$625 million in humanitarian relief and sustainable development programs to people in need. All assistance is provided solely on the basis of need and benefits families, refugees and displaced persons, the elderly, schoolchildren, orphans, and people with disabilities.

“For the Life of the World”: On The AAC in St. Louis

by Fr. Matthew Brown

Hopefulness and Joy —that’s what I came away with from the All-American Council in St. Louis. We Orthodox have a tendency (myself included) to complain about how bad things are, how horrible the world is, and we have a knack for seeing the downside in things. But not in St. Louis. The general tone was optimistic and positive. And despite the many challenges that exist for us, there was still a sense that the Church is on the right track. For many in the OCA such sentiments have not been held for quite some time. The spontaneous pledging of funds for a national youth director in response to a presentation given by the youth of our parishes was perhaps the premier example of this hopefulness manifesting itself. Nearly \$90,000 was raised in less than 10 minutes. There was also a strong sense of unity, even though there are many things that could divide us. Because we make up such a small percentage in this country, it is common for Orthodox Christians, especially clergy, to feel isolated and such isolation – separation from one’s own people – can steal your joy. That is why coming together in unity, despite disagreements or differences, gives birth to joy.



Fr. Paul Kucynda, Fr. Gary and Matushka Mary Breton, and Iconographer Dmitry Shkolnik - whose work adorns many of our Diocesan parishes - at the All American Council.

In many ways the AAC was a celebration of friendships, and the bonds of love which unite us. And who cannot take joy in that.

2018: A Year of Joy and Sadness at Holy Resurrection Church, Wayne

The Very Rev. Paul and Matushka Barbara Kucynda celebrated the 50th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood and their ministry together on January 7, 2018 at Holy Resurrection Church in Wayne, NJ. They were surrounded by Very Rev. John Kluchko, Very Rev. Samuel and Matushka JoAnne Kedala and Very Rev. Eric Tosi, along with many parishioners, children of the parish and friends.

Matushka Barbara fell asleep in the Lord on February 16, 2018. “Motch,” as she is fondly referred to by many, is known for her years of involvement with the youth of the OCA through various efforts and especially her work at St. Andrew’s Camp, Jewel, NY.



May Matushka Barbara’s memory be eternal!

Youth at the AAC

by Danielle Geeza

“St. Louis was a once in a life time experience, seeing bishops from all over the country and the world. The week was filled with inspiring and motivating people. It is nice to know that there are other people your age outside of your parish and Diocese who share your beliefs, and are there to support you when you need them.” – Oksana Karlgut, Youth Program Participant

“As I always say after working a youth event, my heart is full: It is full of joy, full of love for our youth, and full of love for the Church.”

As the Chairperson of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey’s Department of Youth Ministry, I attended the 19th AAC Youth Program as a volunteer staff member working with the high school group. There were over 130 youth

participants from ages 5-18 in attendance, and I wish every child and teen in our Diocese could have experienced everything that the week had to offer, especially meeting other young people from all 50 states in addition to Canada and Mexico. We had 10 youth from our Diocese present, each of whom told me that it was unlike anything that they had ever experienced before: from participating in a Hierarchical Liturgy in a hotel ballroom which was transformed into a chapel with 700+ fellow Orthodox Christians and numerous bishops, to enjoying daily excursions to the St. Louis Arch, Six Flags Amusement Park, the St. Louis Science Center while singing silly camp songs on the bus rides, to chanting Church hymns in the middle of the hotel lobby (all caught on video), and finally a banquet to conclude the week with an off the hook dance party. It was truly unforgettable, with every moment filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. At the closing session of the Council, the youth made a presentation to the Holy Synod of Bishops, clergy, delegates, and observers – complete with singing, a video/photo slideshow of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian, and

finally, a plea from high school students to the OCA at large to provide more opportunities and events like the AAC Youth Program. What resulted from the presentation was truly remarkable: \$87,500 pledged by delegates on the floor to fund a full-time Youth Director for the Orthodox Church in America, in addition to future youth activities.

As Archbishop Michael always says, “The youth are not only the future of the Church, but they are also the present.” I have never been more on fire to continue the momentum from St. Louis and share it with those in our Diocese, a Diocese that is already blessed by God to have robust, organized, and well-attended youth events.

For those who have never attended one of our annual events before, I personally extend an invitation to you for our upcoming opportunities:

- 1) **Annual Girls’ Retreat:** November 9-11, 2018 at St. Basil Academy in Garrison, NY and open to young women in grades 7-12.
- 2) **Annual Altar Server Retreat:** March 1-3, 2019 at St. Basil Academy in Garrison, NY and open to Altar Servers of all ages who currently serve, and for those with an interest in serving in the altar.
- 3) **Annual Lenten Teen Retreat:** April 5-7, 2019 at Camp Shiloh in Hewitt, NJ and open to all teens in grades 7-12 across the Diocese.



I hope to see you participate and witness you experiencing the Christian love and fellowship that keeps our youth coming back year after year.

Our Diocese and the Orthodox Church in Slovakia

by Fr. Joseph Tristan Gall

In July, my son John, mother-in-law Soher and I, accompanied my wife, Matushka Mary, on her weeklong trip to attend the *Conference of Oriental Liturgy* in Prešov, Slovakia. Before leaving, I was provided contact information for Archbishop Michael's cousin, the Mitred Archpriest Michal Rošic, who serves three small parishes within the Carpathian Mountains area of eastern Slovakia—a region familiar to many members of the Orthodox Church in America.



Carpatho-Rusyn congregational singing, still practiced in the small village parishes.

Photographed here is the parish of SS. Peter and Paul in the village of Bodružal, Slovakia—located almost directly on the boarder of Slovakia and Poland. Archbishop Michael, as described below, came several weeks later and consecrated their church.

His Eminence, Archbishop Michael journeyed to the Prešov region of Northeastern Slovakia between August 7th and 14th on the invitation of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Rastislav. His Eminence concelebrated the consecration of the new temple along with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Rastislav, Archbishop of Prešov, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, on August 11th and 12th. The new church was built with the help of funds raised by the Diocese of New York and New Jersey. His Eminence attended meetings, and exchanged gifts, with His Beatitude, whereupon His Eminence presented His Beatitude with an icon and relic of St. Alexis Toth. Other highlights of the visit included several church visits and a formal visit to the headquarters of His Beatitude, as well



as a visit to the village where St. Alexis Toth was born, and a visit to the historical castle of Stara Lubovna. The Mitred Archpriest Michal Rošic graciously hosted His Eminence and the delegation from the Diocese.

Upon arrival, we first stayed in Košice, Slovakia where Fr. Michal Rošic's English-speaking son, Matúš, met us. Over two consecutive Sundays he brought us to the parishes his father serves and where we celebrated the Old Calendar Feast of SS. Peter and Paul with Metropolitan Rastislav at the Cathedral Church in Prešov. In fact, the Conference took place in a hotel that was just a three-minute walk from the Cathedral. Everywhere we visited we were met with generous hospitality and offered gifts. Especially memorable were the fine Slovak cuisine, warm heartfelt fellowship, and



Jacob's
well

Fall 2018

An Iconographic Journey

by Paula Mindzak

Iconography has always played an important part in my life. As a child growing up I always marveled at all the beautiful icons in the church and how they welcomed you with open arms surrounding you with love. Through the years, growing up, one learns more and more about those depicted in the icons and their connection with Christ. Icons reveal how Christ can be reflected in our minds and souls, and throughout our lives. However, while we all might know some basics of iconography such as the egg tempera and items from nature that are used to write the icon, the depth and meaning of each step in the process of colors and layers can be astonishing.

During Great Lent in 2017, our parish, SS. Peter and Paul in South River, provided space for a Diocesan Icon Workshop. We had twelve participants sign up for the workshop; eleven first-timers and one who had written icons before, with ages spanning from teenagers to adults. Our instructor, Lynette Hull, was very informative and helpful all throughout the workshop which didn't seem like "work" at all. What a truly wonderful experience and opportunity this was for our first time class! However, "wonderful" only partially describes just how this class accomplishment would affect me and all the other participants.

Each week after reciting the Icon-Writer's prayers, we began our iconographic journey. As each class progressed it was like we were opening a new chapter in our life drawing us closer to Christ through our messenger, Archangel Michael, (whose name means: "like unto God") and letting us reflect our love for God in the icon. Knowing that icons are written with all natural items was a recognized fact. But, not knowing what all the materials were and how they were prepared resulted in a monumental learning experience. All the colors, layers, pigments, highlights, and floats used reveal the inner beauty and glow that can be seen through the finished icon. We learned more about our life in Christ and grew in an understanding that brought us much closer to Him. The process from the initial gessoed icon board through all the layers of gold leaf, egg tempera mixes of water, wine, pigments of cinnabar, malachite, azurite, lapis, hematite and garosite that were used represented a ladder of ascent to the Kingdom of God for me.

Here are some responses from the first time icon writers:

1. These are the thoughts on how this class enriched my life.

The experience of taking the Lenten icon workshop has enriched my Orthodox faith more than I thought that it would. It did this by adding dimension to my prayer and meditation as I was visually drawn into the ritual tradition. I was not an "artist" during the creation of my icon. I was a pilgrim on a journey through a portal to the divine.

I became cognizant that I would realize my abilities as well as my own limitations in the "beauty" and in the "flaws" of my icon. I appreciate icons in a whole different way, as well as the work of iconographers creating the icons I use to meditate and pray. I was amazed that the combination of ground gemstones, wine, and egg yolks would create a luminescent holy image.

I learned a lot about myself by taking the Lenten Iconography workshop. I discovered that the icon reflected my own image, as I had no idea that I would recognize myself in it. I discovered that while I am not an artist, through this Workshop I was blessed with the ability to create an image that I will always cherish.

2. Icons have always been a part of my foundation of prayer, both in church and at home. Gazing at the images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints makes my prayer life more contemplative; they serve as a very real means of enabling me to connect with God and His love. To have been given the grace of the Holy Spirit to actually write an icon was a gift of faith that I will always treasure.

3. This class was special for many reasons: I appreciated learning about the paints and the technique needed for the icon. It was also interesting to see how we all tried to do the same thing, but in the end each icon was different and beautiful in its own way. At times the work was challenging, but finally very rewarding.

4. I took the class to learn about what was involved in the process of iconography. The whole icon process enlightened me and was amazing and comforting.

5. While I grew up with icons in church and in my homes, and understood the learning messages taught to us through the “icon itself,” (especially for those who could not read), I had no idea how much meditation/concentration it took to write one. I’d heard of “egg tempera” and knew that for centuries colors were created from plants and herbs, but didn’t realize the amount of work necessary to create those colors, and how they reacted with each other and the wood frame base. It was very interesting and we were lucky to have Lynette create them for us.

I knew writing an icon took special talent and patience; however I didn’t know all the personal, human connection needed to complete one. The idea of connecting the art materials with the wood and gold leaf was also something I didn’t know about. It was amazing to see how breathing on the gold leaf helped it adhere to the wood base, and that, in addition to the “naturally created colors,” you put your own personal self into writing your icon. The process brought you closer to Christ and the spiritual desire to complete your icon. It was amazing to see how the various color combinations worked together, especially how the greenish face and hands became more human-like after mixing colors and floating processes. I also learned that there is a “stepping stone” process of writing an icon: it was explained that we would begin with the Archangel Michael and then move to the Archangel Gabriel (rather than choosing an icon we would like to work on). Having no artistic ability at all, I was very surprised to see how well my icon turned out. Of course it wouldn’t have happened without Lynette’s help.

We had a wonderful group of twelve students ranging in age from sixteen to over eighty. Lynette began each class with a prayer; played hymns in the background, which I thought helped to lessen the anxiety of feeling your work wouldn’t be good enough. She gave everyone relaxed instructions and assistance when needed. Her ability to “fix” mistakes relieved some of our stress. She and the class members were all supportive of each other. It was a lot of hard work on one hand, and calming on the other. Would love to take another class, Lynette!!

6. I hold dear the icons given to me by my parents. They are beautiful visuals of my faith, and they remind me to slow down and make my day more calm and peaceful. I thought creating an icon would be a spiritual journey and at the end I would have a very special heirloom and that it was. At times, my need

for perfection was a bit challenging and stressful, but I redirected that energy to silent prayer and serenity resurfaced. We were told there would be opportunities to fix things that needed to be tweaked, referred to as “forgiveness,” and that too brought quiet. Lynette was excellent in conveying that message and her class lessons gave meaning to what we were doing. I smile as I think about the class and our time together, and my icon that is a beautiful reminder that God is present in my home.

7. I really enjoyed getting together with everyone to paint our icons every week and working together. It was cool to see how they were made, especially after looking at them my whole life. I looked forward to class and would do it again.

8. Coming to icon class during Lent was very inspirational and uplifting for me. With the multiple different steps involved in the process of Icon Writing, I looked forward to learning something new about iconography and myself each and every week. I really wish that I could do it again.

I did not realize how natural the materials used in iconography are (consisting of ground pigments, egg tempera etc.).

The gold leaf process of gilding and burnishing the halo until shiny was totally new for me as well.

Taking the icon class assists you in assessing your spiritual life. In addition, it particularly helped me identify my flaws, weaknesses, and strengths. For example my excessive coffee drinking had to stop for me to have a more steady disciplined hand when writing the icon. I also discovered how very stressed I was. However, with each week of the program that passed, and with prayers, and liturgical music playing in the background, I felt less anxious and more at peace.

Although I have been brought up in the Orthodox Faith and have been surrounded by icons since birth, I didn’t appreciate how labor intensive each and every step of icon writing is and the various techniques involved. It is hard to believe that we started the journey with only a white gesso. I will definitely not look at an icon the same way again! This class helped me appreciate the meaning and beauty of each and every icon. I was amazed how we were all given the same instructions by our teacher, Lynette Hull, but each icon looked slightly different, showing the different traits of the iconographer.

Response from the class participant who previously wrote icons:

9. I feel that the class increased my faith in Orthodox Christianity because of the crucial role that iconography plays in the Orthodox Church and the close connection between the two. So anything that would increase my knowledge of, and interest in, iconography (which is what the class did) would necessarily bolster my faith in the Orthodox Church.

The class showed that even a relatively simple icon, like the Archangel Michael we did, is actually a harmonious combination of many distinct components and not just a simple painting that pretty much anyone can do with a little effort and training (which is an idea I had before trying to write an actual icon).

The process of icon writing necessarily encourages the student to enhance personal qualities such as patience, persistence, and humility.

In Conclusion

The Lenten practice of making icons opened up a new understanding of the “real” icon we are working on all the time – ourselves, who are icons made in the image of God. While, for most of us, this was our first icon, through this process, we began to see glimmers both of what we need to work on specifically in ourselves and what we might become through that work on our image.

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

Being able to have this opportunity was an outstanding accomplishment for all who participated in the class.

So to our messenger, Archangel Michael, we ask that he continue to intercede to God for us with a continued celebration of life in our faith, with our families, and all we know.



Back Row L-R: Anastasia Essl, Natasha Rogozenski, Irene Strapko, Myra Brown, Olga Kornafel, Nicholas Romanofsky, Jay Pelleriti, Alexandra Romanofsky, Paula Mindzak; Front Row L-R: Mira Dostanich, Alexia May, Gerard Pelletier.

What's Going on in Oneonta

By the grace of God, great things are happening at St. Innocent of Alaska Orthodox Mission in Oneonta, New York. Over this past year, we have been increasing our outreach efforts in Oneonta and in the surrounding communities. We have begun first by continuing the beautification of our worship space with our new iconography project. We discovered many beautiful paper icons that were donated to the Mission from various donors in the past and Fr. Vasil Dubee is in the process of building appropriate frames for them. We also purchased an updated, more visible sign with our parish name and service schedule listing. It was designed by the parish council, purchased, installed and blessed.

Sunday School and Adult education are held following every Sunday Divine Liturgy. It has created an excellent environment for Q&A discussion on various topics and aspects of the Orthodox Faith. The Mission continues to increase its outreach

any way possible, striving towards our ultimate goal of building a church, building a permanent community to offer the Orthodox Faith to the people of Oneonta and the surrounding area. Fr. Vasil teaches classes about Orthodox Christianity for the local Center for Continuing Adult Learning and a summer course on Orthodoxy at the Seminary Institute at Hartwick College in Oneonta. In addition to this, Fr. Vasil has been granted a bi-monthly column in the local Oneonta newspaper, *The Daily Star*, where he writes articles about Orthodox teachings and theology.

We have discovered that ethnic food is very difficult to find in the Oneonta area, so we decided to try our first ethnic food sale in the summer of 2016. It was a tremendous success and to our surprise, we sold out of food within one hour! Eastern-European foods made by Fr. Vasil, Pani Lesya and parishioners have given us the opportunity to meet more people and introduce our parish further into the community.

All of the profits go towards our building fund. Our parish also holds food drives for a local Oneonta soup kitchen, The Lord's Table, to give back to the community for those in need.

Perhaps our greatest accomplishment to date has been our land purchase. The Mission bought 10-acres of land and the property was closed on in January 2017. The day the land was purchased, it was also completely paid off. This was thanks to a most generous donation by the A. Lindsay and Olive B. O'Connor Foundation, a foundation which donates money to such projects, churches, bridges, townhalls and multiple charitable causes. After having the parish's



10-acre plot of land surveyed this summer, the land is currently being logged with over 100 hardwood trees being harvested to be sold for timber. This will make the task of clearing the land for future building plans much easier. A 7' tall Jerusalem cross was donated to our parish by the Very Rev. Jason Vansuch and the

Orthodox Church of St. George in Buffalo, NY for us to plant on our acreage when we break ground. The cross will stand to show all who pass by that we will build an Orthodox temple there.

Our parish is grateful for His Eminence, Archbishop Michael's visits, pastoral leadership, and constant encouragement. In addition to His Eminence's love and kindness, we also want to thank our Dean, Archpriest Alexey Karlgut and all of the clergy, matushki and parishioners of SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Endicott, NY for always coming to our aid whenever we need assistance, especially during the hierarchical divine liturgies. We also wish to thank all of the Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors and Diocesan supporters for their generosity. Without their help, the parish could not be what it is. THANK YOU from everyone at St. Innocent of Alaska Mission!

Celebrating Father Paul and Matushka Mary Shafran - 70 Years of Faithful Marriage and Church Ministry

On October 28, 2017, the parish of St. Vladimir Orthodox Church, Trenton, NJ, together with other friends, family, and clergy honored Father Paul and Matushka Mary Shafran for their 70 years of church marriage and church ministry, 68 of which have been in Trenton. Their actual wedding date was November 27, 1947, at Matushka's home parish in Warren, OH, and Father Paul was ordained to the Holy Priesthood by the hand of Archbishop Nikon on December 28, 1947, at the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection, New York City. The festive day commenced with a Divine Liturgy, followed by a testimonial banquet. (His Eminence Michael, Archbishop of New York and the NY/NJ Diocese, proposed the celebration

service, charity, and love," and recognizing Father Paul's anniversary of ordination. Father Joseph also read two letters from Archbishop Michael, similarly praising the couple's service to Christ and the Church in many capacities, and extolling Father Paul for his personal commitment "to the growth of each of your sheep . . . and to the expansion of the parishes you have served, as well as the entire Orthodox Church in our land."

The celebration continued at the catered banquet, where Father Daniel Skvir, Rector at Holy Transfiguration Chapel, Princeton University, served as Master of Ceremonies. "Longevity is a gift of God," he noted, and citing the fifth commandment, "today we honor a very special father and mother." Father Joseph advised the visiting seminarians in particular that "in this Diocese, we show respect for tradition and for our senior clergy, and today we honor a model couple who set a record in our culture today." Father Daniel observed that Father Paul himself has historically treated senior priests with respect, and in the altar, likewise respects younger clergy, treating "all as equals, regardless of rank." He doesn't "flaunt his clergy awards, though he deservedly earned many." Father Chad Hatfield, President of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, echoed this sentiment in commenting on serving with Father Paul today for the first time. "It was not as if a senior priest was standing in our midst; it was simply as a brother," he remarked, calling Father "the gold standard of the conduct of a priest." Father Chad commended Father Paul for blending "the theological with that which is practical" throughout his ministry and, he added, "you loved your people." These traits, he said, are the "mark of a great priest." Father Chad then surprised Father and Matushka by announcing the Seminary's establishment of the "The V. Rev. Paul and Matushka Mary Endowment" to provide funds "to benefit all aspects of student life" at the Seminary.



Fr. Paul and Matushka Mary with their daughters, Paula and Nina

more than a year ago and had planned to attend, but presided that day at the funeral of +Archpriest Stephen Mack.)

Archpriest Joseph Lickwar, Chancellor of the NY/NJ Diocese, presided at the Liturgy, joined by Father Paul, Father Volodymyr Chiakivskyi (Rector in Trenton), and several clergy from within and outside the diocese. At the Liturgy's conclusion, Father Joseph presented two gramotas on behalf of the OCA's Holy Synod, commending the couple's faithful witness together as priest and matushka, parents, grandparents – "examples of Christian

Father Volodymyr, who was happy to see the hall filled to capacity, called the celebration a "feast for the whole parish." He commended Father Paul for dedicating his life to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Church, and to the growth of the parish, as a good shepherd of deep faith, to whom

everyone can come for help and consolation.” He expressed his personal gratitude to both Father and Matushka for all they have done, and on behalf of the parish, presented a generous donation to the new Endowment.

Father Daniel reminded all that the one person who has kept going like her “energizer bunny” husband is Mary, citing her grace, warm hospitality, and love for the spiritual well-being of the parishioners. “She lovingly fulfills the duties of a perfect helpmate – the most perfect matushka.” Parishioner Dottie Lovchuk agreed, calling her “the epitome of the perfect matushka,” and Father Chad added that, “as we all know, a priest is nothing without his matushka!” In his own remarks, Father Paul explained how his friend +Father Michael Kapral had invited him to Warren, OH to find a bride, and how there was an immediate attraction between him and Mary. “It was important to find the right kind of girl,” and in those days, he added, a young woman had to have a letter from her parish priest to the bishop, attesting to her good standing in the Church and her worthiness to be the wife of a parish priest.

Father Daniel also referred to Father Paul’s second calling as a “horticulturist par excellence.” Parishioner Eric McRoy recalled first meeting Father Paul in his gardening clothes, holding a branch of tomatoes but stopping immediately to show him and his now-wife Mimi the church. “Father Paul’s tomatoes are growing in all of us,” McRoy added. “We are on the vines of his tomato branch - connected in some way to his tomatoes.” He expressed gratitude to Matushka and Father for welcoming them with open arms, as did Parishioner Awet Manna, who recounted how she and her husband sought out an Orthodox Church and immediately felt so at home in Trenton.

Numerous other guests offered reminiscences and anecdotes. Among them were Father Stephen Kopestonsky, who had served as Father Paul’s altar boy and credited him as a model priest who heavily influenced his decision to attend Seminary; Father John Shimchick, who surmised that a secret of Father Paul’s longevity must be his insistence on using stairs rather than elevators; Tony Kasmer, who said “I’m with you, Father – there’s nothing in the Bible about retiring”; Anatole Forostenko, whose family of “displaced persons” from Europe eventually migrated to Trenton because of Father Paul, and there Anatole first learned that “God understands English as well as Slavonic;” Dr. Michael Taptykoff, who noted that

Father has never stopped visiting his parishioners who are now in nursing homes, and thanked him for being “an inspiration in humility and genuine Christian love.” The couple’s daughters and granddaughters also added their memories and insights.

Father Paul recounted how his parish priest, +Father Joseph Pishtey, encouraged and assisted him in going to college and seminary, in contrast to other priests who had discouraged the young Paul from pursuing what they said would be a very difficult life, especially for the young priests who “started at the bottom” in poor parishes. He thanks God, he said, that he is still able to serve the Lord. Matushka never thought she would marry a priest, “but it has all been very good!” The couple expressed their love for all in attendance and thanked them for coming and making the day so joyful.

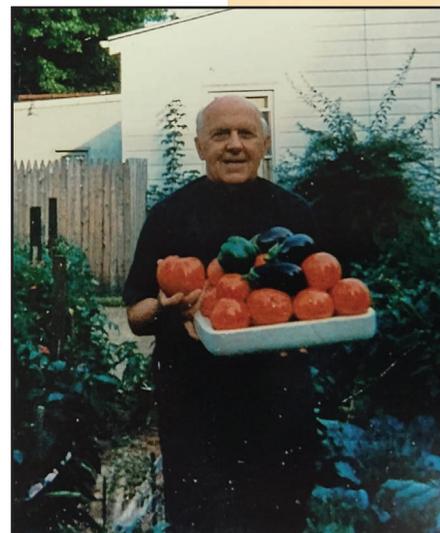
A few days later, on December 1st, Father and Matushka were honored by Archbishop Michael at the Diocesan Assembly in Endicott, NY. Father served with His Eminence at the Divine Liturgy that morning, delivered the homily about his priesthood, and made brief remarks that afternoon focusing on his marriage and children. Father ended his sermon that morning with the words he overheard in his youth from an elderly priest (in Russian): “I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.” This was similar to the ending of his remarks at the banquet in Trenton, where he sang from a Baptist hymn: “This is my story, this is my song – praising the Lord Jesus, all the day long.”

We extend our warmest congratulations and love to Father and Matushka on reaching these remarkable God-given milestones. May God continue to bless them for many years!

Video interviews with Fr. Paul and Matushka Mary are available as part of our Diocesan oral history series — *Gift and Grace: The Spiritual Legacy of Orthodox Christians in America*:

<https://nynjoca.org/interviews.html>.

Jacob's
well
Fall 2018



In Memoriam: Fr. Stephen Mack

(+October 26, 2017)

by Fr. Michael Speck

It will soon be a year since the parish of St. Nicholas in Auburn, NY, said its final farewell to the departed Archpriest Stephen Mack, pastor and friend, who served Christ's Holy Church here for more than thirty years. While the community continues to thrive and to serve God, Fr. Steve remains very much alive in the community's thoughts and prayers. And this will not change as long as those whom he guided in our Orthodox Faith live their lives and struggle to work out their salvation in this world.

One could recall his gentleness in caring for the members of his flock and his humor. We remember his compassion and the love for those around him; his family, friends, and parishioners. And as he battled his terrible illness for five and a half years, we are reminded of how he bore his sufferings with great courage and patience. However, such remembrances of Fr. Steve cannot fully describe him. Our words fall short of the mark.



So we are truly blessed to have some of his own words, written during the last weeks of his earthly life. I consider these blog entries to be very much the measure of Fr. Steve's love for life and those around him.

September 15, 2017

I've tried to keep my Parish family (and my many friends who continue to pray for me), apprised of my current health situation. A bit over 6 weeks ago I was living a pretty much regular life. That changed a while back.

For anyone not aware of my situation: I've been dealing with pancreatic and liver cancer for five years. No complaints here. Life goes on; whatever we face, we face with God's help. Recently my medical progress regressed rapidly. We were actually in Myrtle Beach and I had to go to the emergency room. MRI showed a tumor on my spine. I flew to Strong Hospital in Rochester, had another MRI and

was told my cancer has gone to my brain and spine. Hey, it's LIFE. I'll deal with it the best I can.

Biggest problem: the tumor took my leg nerves so I can't walk. I rely on walkers and family. Matushka Barbara has been a SAINT! I don't think I can do it without her help..

I have a hospital bed, everything I can basically use – with, of course, all the prayers I can get. I can't spend enough time thanking everyone for their prayers, gifts. I naturally worry about my family. It's funny. You never think you'd be the first to go, yet I think I understand Matushka Barbara is really the stronger of our two. Coming up on 39 years of marriage!

What does the future hold? It certainly doesn't look promising. I may have mentioned some of these things before: I lost a friend to cancer (Kevin) when I was 13. I lost my best friend and really a true brother at 25 to a diving accident. I had walked to his house that morning to ask him to be in our wedding. I lost my best friend and seminary roommate to cancer in his forties. Everyone goes through these things in life; I'm no different. Archpriest Michael Speck is fortunately here and has been a great help. Archbishop Michael has been great. I correspond regularly with an old seminary friend. I don't lack for friends or support.

Anyways, that pretty much covers things. Please keep me in your prayers. Also, pray for a boy named Spencer. I don't know his case. He would come into the area while I was receiving radiation. He's about ten years old, confined to a hospital bed. Pray especially for the young ones who might still have a chance to beat all this garbage. And please know I love you all and appreciate you.

October 7, 2017

I'M IN A SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL POSITION. While my body is wearing down, my dad, at 96, is still growing strong. I always figured I'd outlive him — it's a natural order of succession. However, these days it looks like I'll beat him to the finish line.

My Dad has Alzheimer's. It usually takes him a little while to recognize me, but he does. He often thinks I'm his dead brother, Nicky. He hasn't seen me in my current state, unable to walk without a walker. Funny thing is, he could beat me in a walker race! I don't want him to see me like this because I know he'll worry.

So, what have I learned from him? I've learned that I don't believe I ever could have had a better father. He's been a rock throughout my life, always involved in our church, always the type of person who would help anyone. My Dad was very inventive. He made a riding lawnmower by welding half a bicycle to a power lawnmower. He was extremely handy with everything.

My Dad was a bus driver for a long time. My Mom would work at times. We lived close enough to my Elementary School that I could come for lunch, and Dad would be there between bus runs. Every day he'd make me a special drink with lunch. Most were great, some clunkers. We'd laugh about them.

Baseball cards: my Dad got me into it in 1962; every year he would search the stores to find a new box of cards for me to open. I can still picture those first cards. My favorite all-time player—Roger Maris. The other Yankees. Casey Stengel as Manager of the Mets. My Dad wasn't a Yankees' fan; he rooted for whoever they were against (the Yanks won too often for his liking).

After he hit 61 homers, Maris made a movie with Mantle. My Dad managed to get tickets, and we saw the movie. I remember going to the concession stand and my Dad asking what I wanted. When I couldn't decide he suggested Butterfinger, his favorite. It instantly became my favorite because of respect for him. I've asked my parish family during a sermon about their favorite and why. Now, you know mine.

Dad was a Navy man. He spent some time in World War II on Mine Sweepers off New England,

then spent the rest of the War in the Pacific on a supply ship, the USS Tolovanna. As a Navy man, we'd watch the Army-Navy football game on TV. He instilled a respect for all sports in me. Friday night boxing was a highlight.

Hard to believe, but I wasn't a perfect teenager. Yeah, right! My friends, after a school dance, couldn't convince my parents my problem was too much pizza. My parents suspected some libations. The result was a full day of yard work with a hangover!

One of the greatest lessons my Dad told me: When my parents were married they lived in a duplex they owned in Cohoes. One time my parents went away. When they came back their tenant had left, no rent, and they took some furniture. Years later I'm at a Fair with my Dad. He points to a man and tells me that's the one who took things. I'm like, "Yeah, let's get him!" My Dad says "He's with his son, the son doesn't know, I won't embarrass him in front of his son." Forgiveness. Compassion. Faith. A great lesson learned.

So many things he did for me. In seminary my parents would drive down at Pascha. After Liturgy we'd drive home so I could be in Cohoes for the morning Liturgy. He would always put himself out to help.

I don't know what the future holds for Dad and me. I miss being able to see him. But I think right now it's for the best. But I do know I love him, and I feel God has given me as great a Dad as he possibly could be. I love you Dad!"

+++

May our continued love for Fr. Steve be expressed by praying for him and his family every day. May we remember his love for us, for as St. Paul wrote, "Love never ends" (1Corinthians 13:8).

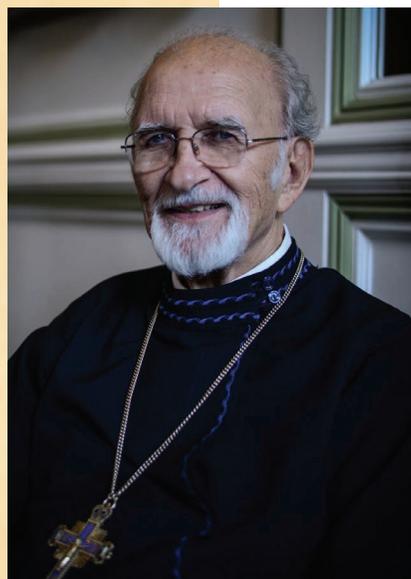
May his memory be eternal.

Corinthians 1:9-11

9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

In Memoriam: Fr. John Nehrebecki (+April 7, 2018)

by Fr. Stephen Vernak



It's a great honor to write this short reflection on the newly-departed Mitred Archpriest John Nehrebecki, known to us in his family, simply as "Papa." From childhood I was aware that he was a person who commanded great respect from his peers and that he was gifted with a unique charisma.

I would like to share just three of his positive qualities, but before I do, I would like to acknowledge, as is our Christian duty, that Father John was a sinner, and a fellow struggler. He was not perfect; however, to the very end of his earthly life he struggled to be repentant. He was not a fan of perfunctory statements, or of pseudo-hagiographical hyperbole. Understand what I write below in the light of this truth.

Consistent

Both he and Matushka Eugenia "Baba" held themselves to a particularly high level of decorum and "dressed the part." Father John's private life and public life were consistent. What folks knew of him in the Church, was what we knew of him in our family. It wasn't an "act;" he was authentically himself. He spoke about Christ at home, the same way he talked about Him from the Ambo. His zeal for the Christian way of life (often misunderstood, or seen as arrogance), his real and daily struggle to live this life, and his desire for others to strive to live this life, was played out among us when we gathered as an immediate family, in much the same way as I saw it play out in the context of the parish family. During his funeral, my brother-in-law, Father Victor Gorodenchuk, beautifully summed up Father John's vocation as the "patriarch" – he took this role seriously, and it often came with a sacrifice. Writing this reflection, I remain thankful for his love, his example, his corrections, and also his consistency!

Creative

Father John was creative, which also means that he was a risk-taker. This past Sunday I wore

a set of Father John's vestments, known as the "Kimono Vestments", that I feel are emblematic of this particular characteristic. A parishioner who traveled to Japan brought him back a kimono as a gift. Most of us would politely say thank you, and eventually this "gift" would find itself in the dark recesses of a closet, in a box in the attic, or in a bag destined for Goodwill. He saw the beauty of the kimono and found a way to bring it into the Church by having it tailored into a stunning set of vestments. This spirit of creativity is consistent with the Apostolic Tradition and the desire to bring all things unto Christ. Fr. John was forever "re-appropriating" furniture, jewelry, fabric, literature, etc. into something that was worthy of the Temple of God, helping these items or concepts find new purpose and their true meaning. What most would simply walk past or dismiss, Father John would esteem as valuable. Most importantly, this creativity was demonstrated in the way that he approached people. One of his greatest gifts was his ability to find "touchstones" for people of all backgrounds, creeds, and cultures who were seeking truth and he found a way to incorporate their experience into an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Generous

There is a spiritual principle "the more you give, the more God blesses." Father John was generous with his time, knowledge, and his material goods. I remember once thinking (read: judging) – "Doesn't he have too many pectoral crosses, vestments, cassocks etc.?" Yet the truth is he was so generous with these items that God saw fit to keep blessing him with more of them. This past October I was visiting the Holy Mountain and stayed at St. Anne Skete on the southern tip of the peninsula. This monastery is located in a remote part of Mount Athos. At one of the smaller associated communities I met an elderly monk. When I told him I was originally from New Jersey he asked me, through a translator, if I knew Father John and Matushka Eugenia. Imagine my surprise! After Vespers this same monk took us to a place where they host visitors and he brought out a box which

Continued on page 27

St. Olympia Mission - Potsdam, NY

by Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis

When I first came to Potsdam, NY, in 1996 to interview for a teaching position at the Crane School of Music, I discovered to my chagrin just how “centrally isolated” the North Country truly is. It didn’t bother me that there was no shopping mall to supplement a small-town Main Street, but it loomed large that there was no Orthodox church and that I would need to travel a little over an hour to Brockville, Ontario, or a full hour and a half either to Watertown, NY, or to Ottawa to attend Liturgy. Frankly, I did not think that I would be staying at Crane very long. My wish was to find a position much closer to my husband so that we would not have a commuting marriage. Little did I know what a treasure the Crane School of Music would become for me professionally and that I would be spending most of my academic career there.

Soon after my arrival, I encountered another Orthodox person, someone whom I had met previously at church music conventions — Cindy Eyler, an attorney who had moved to the North Country because of her work. Cindy was as determined to go to liturgy as I was, so we travelled together as often as we could, taking any other Orthodox we encountered along with us. As we could, we arranged for an occasional service on the SUNY-Potsdam campus and the Greek Orthodox Church in Watertown came up to Potsdam twice a year.

As our lives became more knit to the North Country, it became obvious that there were Orthodox who were not comfortable with crossing the border to attend services and even more critical, we were encountering Orthodox graduate students from Eastern European countries who were unable to enter Canada due to visa restrictions. We dreamed of having a local Orthodox church, one that was primarily in English but sensitive to all “expressions” of Orthodoxy. God works in mysterious ways: by this time there was a small monastic community about 30 min. from Potsdam, just over the Canadian border, and our father confessor encouraged us to contact both Vladyka Michael and Vladyka Irenée in order to explore a cross-border arrangement. With their blessing and support, it was in this way that we were able to take our very first steps as a “Mission

Station.” We held our first service in a lounge of the university conference center in February 2012. Fr. David Edwards, a hieromonk who had come to live at the monastic community, was able to come to Potsdam twice a month to serve liturgy.

Very soon, we discovered that worshipping on a college campus had significant drawbacks: the campus closed down during academic breaks, space was not always available, and burning candles and



incense violated fire codes. Then, of course, there was the ever-present challenge of set-up and tear down, and no place on campus for storage. When spring break came around, we were left with no place to go. Right around that time, I was replacing and enlarging an addition to my home, and even though the space was still very much under construction, we held our Sunday service there, and we ended up staying. This addition somehow grew into a beautiful and precious worship space for us. Little-by-little, we replaced icons balanced on music stands with an iconostasis made out of extra tongue-and-groove flooring, a kitchen table with an altar, a sand-filled plastic box with a brass candle stand... Donations of liturgical items came from other parishes, from Elijah’s Mantle, from people who heard about the Mission and of course, from our own parishioners.

Sometimes I have to pinch myself to believe that this addition has become sacred space that is an integral part of our lives. Truly, we have been blessed.

Vladyka Michael's love, support and encouragement have been central to our growth as a worshipping community. He has come to Potsdam twice each year. One visit of particular importance was when he came to name our Mission. I believe that we are the only church on this continent (and we haven't found any elsewhere) to have St. Olympia the Deaconess as our patron. She is well-suited to guide us by her intercessions for many reasons. She was a well-educated, theologically astute person who used her wealth and resources for the Church, and founded institutions for the poor and needy. Potsdam is a college town and there are four colleges within ten miles of our chapel – I can just imagine that St. Olympia would have appreciated an intellectual community such as this – but beyond the campus borders the economic challenges are all too apparent. We would do well to emulate her life.

When Fr. David retired, Fr. Luke Majoros from the same monastic community became our priest. We were able to expand to liturgies every Sunday. Eventually, we added Great Vespers on Saturday evening. Even before that, we built a web site, a Facebook page and began to send out weekly bulletins via e-mail.

As of July 5th of this year, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and with the support of Vladyka Michael and the Diocesan Council, we took another step forward: Fr. Peter Irfan was assigned Acting Rector of our parish. He and Matushka Mary have moved to Potsdam, just a block away from our chapel. Thus, Fr. Peter has become the North Country's very first resident Orthodox priest. It is our hope that, in addition to leading our spiritual growth, by his very presence and daily encounters with people in Potsdam and the surrounding villages, he can be a driving force in helping us put a "public face" on St. Olympia Orthodox Mission, and to spread the Good News of Orthodoxy in the North Country.

Our challenges are typical ones for churches in college towns, perhaps the most notable being a

transient population — it is wonderful to welcome the freshmen and bitter-sweet to see them graduate and move away. When we look back at our photos, we are surprised at how many people our Mission has served in six years.

For me, personally, having the chapel next to the campus has been wonderful for a very special course that I teach: *Byzantium: Religion and the Arts in the Christian East*. As part of the course, students study our hymnography and actually become a choir for a Vespers service. This gives them intimate exposure and insight regarding how all the liturgical arts knit together to form a powerful expression of our faith.

St. Olympia the
Deaconess...
well-suited to
guide us as
our patron

Yet a major challenge to our Mission is this very worship space. Since our chapel is part of a house it is not, and cannot be, zoned as a church. Because of this, we cannot advertise our location. This makes outreach extremely difficult! We know there are more Orthodox in the area, as well as people who are hungry for the depth and richness of our faith, but our means of reaching them is severely hampered. We still hold occasional services on the campus, usually Vespers paired with a guest speaker, thanks to Vladyka Michael. This is a critical form of outreach since we can legally advertise events on the campus and thus make our presence known (but not our address).

There is another challenge that we face, one that we hope and pray actually becomes more critical: even if it could be zoned for public worship, our present space does not allow for growth—the chapel is quite intimate! For this reason, we have started a building fund and have located a potential property (a former church that could be reconverted). We ask for the prayers of those who read this.

For more information or to make a donation to the St. Olympia Orthodox Church building fund go to <http://saintolympiaorthodoxchurch.org/>

Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis is a professor at the Crane School of Music, SUNY-Potsdam where she teaches music theory, harp and Byzantine studies. In addition to academic degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Eastman School of Music and Indiana University, she holds two diplomas in Byzantine music from Greek conservatories. She is a Reader and Chanter.

St. Simon Mission Parish's Outreach to the African-American Community

For over a decade now, the OCA has committed herself to reaching out to traditionally evangelically marginalized communities – the African-American in particular. While interest in Orthodoxy continues to grow among Black Pentecostal and Protestant churches (in what is often referred to as the Early Church or Ancient Faith, or simply and directly, Orthodoxy), actual outreach and evangelistic ministry to these communities has not been without challenges. And while that will undoubtedly change with time, some things are beginning to change right now.

It has been over 100 years since the first Black priest, Fr. Raphael Morgan, walked the territory of New York, but now our Diocese has a newly-planted mission in the inner city of New Brunswick specifically dedicated to Orthodox evangelism to African-Americans. Within the last 18 months, a mission – St. Simon's – has been planted, and Samuel Davis has been ordained to the diaconate and, as of May of this year, the priesthood, all the while undertaking the M.Div. program at St. Tikhon's Seminary.

Father Samuel's interest in outreach is intense. In the period noted, St. Simon's has undertaken a widely promoted Akathist to the African Saints, a Molieben for Racial Reconciliation (each attended by upwards of 70+ participants, especially local area non-Orthodox clergy), participated in the Diocesan-hosted 2017 Conference of the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black in Princeton and will soon be hosting for a second time the aforementioned Akathist in September, and a Fall Symposium on *The Reformation From the Perspective of the Orthodox Church* in October. This latter event in particular will examine the Reformation, its roots, philosophical, theological, and cultural development and the response of the Orthodox Church as given

by seminary faculty and noted clergy. Interest and feedback from the community is already high.

Mission outreach is done via social media and personal contacts with non-Orthodox clergy in the south Jersey area, and while interest has been exhibited from farther beyond, the focus is of course in the immediate central and south Jersey area. Facebook has played an important role as an outreach tool, and makes possible a broad connection to interested clergy and laity in the area.

The results can already be seen in the interest and responses received to-date. Non-Orthodox clergy and laity from both within and outside the Diocese are in steady contact with Fr. Samuel and Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff, and plans are now underway to work with several particular groups who have expressed an interest in pursuing their study and knowledge of Orthodoxy with the purpose of, God willing, one day entering the Orthodox Church.

Your prayers for the successful work of St. Simon's and the continued outreach to African-Americans are much needed and certainly much appreciated!

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Luke 6:46-49

46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? 47 I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. 48 That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

Fr. Volodymyr Chaikivskyi and St. Vladimir's Church, Trenton

One of last year's joys for the parish was the official affirmation of Fr. Volodymyr Chaikivskyi as the community's pastor. This took place during the annual celebration of the feast of St. Vladimir on July 15, which was celebrated by Archbishop Michael and local clergy.

Both Father Volodymyr and his wife, Matushka Oksana, are originally from Ukraine. Father was from a small town of 76,000 people in Ukraine called Drohobych, in the Lviv region of the country. Before arriving in the United States, Father had previously completed seminary studies in Ukraine, yet was unsure where he would find his place to serve the Lord. After his graduation in Ukraine, he was convinced by his uncle, Fr. Maryan, to move to the United States and find an opportunity here. So in August of 2009, at the age of 20 and barely able to speak English, the young man Volodymyr Chaikivskyi moved from the Ukraine to the United States with the goal to attend St. Tikhon's Theological Seminary and then serve the Lord in the United States, as a full time pastor. With much dedication and hard work Father was able to graduate seminary in 2013, all the while learning and improving his English as he progressed.



From the very beginning Father and Matushka have demonstrated a loving and happy warmth toward the parish and all those around them. No task is ever too large or too small for them to take on or just help in any way they can for anyone who asks. Father is the first person to lend a helping hand in any sort of task or lead parish efforts to get things done. He spends his time serving in the altar, improving the parish grounds and cemetery, and facilitating various projects getting accomplished throughout the parish. He is not one to wait to be asked, but looks for opportunities to serve wherever he is available. Already many projects have been completed in their short time at the parish. Projects like repairing the roof to our church building, completing maintenance at our picnic grounds and cemetery, as well as many others. With Father's untiring efforts and by the grace of God, St. Vladimir has witnessed the arrival of many newcomers to the parish over the past year and a half.

Since Father Volodymyr's arrival, the parish has grown and continues to welcome new parishioners and catechumens. The parish congratulates Father on his installation as rector and on receipt of his award, and looks forward to many fruitful years under his pastoral care, with Matushka Oksana at his side.

Mission to the Hispanic Community

by Jose Alberto Sanchez Fierro

With the blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Michael and under the supervision of Archpriest Fr. David Cowan, I serve as an Orthodox catechist to those within the Spanish-speaking community who are interested in knowing more about the Orthodox Faith. We have developed teaching materials in Spanish and are pleased to make them freely available.

Contact me for more information:

347-255-9591

Facebook: orthodox mission OCA

E-mail: joseorthodoxo33@gmail.com

Visit our Spanish website at:

<https://www.iglesia-ortodoxa-espanol.com/>

May God Our Lord fill your heart and your life with peace, love, and many blessings.

Centennial Celebration of the Transfiguration Cathedral in Brooklyn 1916 - 2016

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On September 24 and 25, 2016, the Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Williamsburg, Brooklyn celebrated its 100th anniversary of the blessing of the building's cornerstone. The Liturgy was concelebrated by His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, His Eminence Archbishop Michael, and other clergy, deacons, subdeacons, and many altar servers, and was attended by many laypeople.

It was on April 5, 1908 that the first service was celebrated by Saint Alexander Hotovitzky, then Dean of New York's Saint Nicholas Cathedral, marking the establishment of the parish—initially dedicated to Saint Vladimir. Work began on the building in 1916 after His Eminence, the late Archbishop Evdokim blessed the cornerstone and renamed the parish in honor of the Great Feast of the Transfiguration. In 1969, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the cathedral a city landmark. In recognition of its historical and architectural significance, it also was listed on the National Register of Historical Places by the US Department of the Interior on April 16, 1980.



Pysanky Workshop at the Church of the Mother of God, Mays Landing, NJ



In Memoriam: Fr John Nehrebecki, continued from page 22

contained a beautiful jeweled cross... it was given to him by Father John. I have heard similar stories from priests in Alaska, New York, Pennsylvania, and places in between. It seems the Lord invested Father John with intellectual, personal, and materials gifts, because He knew that they would be held onto “lightly” and shared generously.

This short list is certainly not exhaustive, yet I hope it is representative. The loss of our “patriarch”, our “Papa” has left a deep hole in the body of our family, immediate and extended, which can only be healed by the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ! At the same time, the circumstances surrounding Father John’s death continue to be a great consolation

– stricken shortly after receiving Confession, Communion, and Holy Unction; passing on Great and Holy Saturday; a Bright Week Funeral; the overwhelming outpouring of prayers and support; and celebrating his 40th day on the Leave-taking of Pascha! We pray that the Lord will forgive him his sins, that He would “consign them to oblivion”, and that He would grant him a good Resurrection with those who will “hear His voice and live.” May his soul dwell with the blessed and may his memory be eternal!

Fr. Stephen Vernak is the pastor of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church, Harrisburg, PA.

Can the Work of Mission Be Taught?

by Fr. Joel Brady

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Last August, I was blessed to attend the OCA's Mission School. As a newly-ordained priest, newly placed in a mission parish, I certainly could be seen as needing some schooling on the subject! And it was indeed an intensive week, with classes and discussions on many aspects of mission life.

So you could ask the question: Did I come away knowing "how to do mission?" And the answer would have to be: not really. Reasonable enough – if we had discovered hard-and-fast methods for mission growth, we'd see Orthodox missions growing and flourishing everywhere. We were blessed to come together as people doing this work of mission, including many who've done it for years, and share stories and ideas of things to try. Perhaps most important in this was simply the encouragement. None of us are the first ones to confront this work, and while the challenges are always new and different, the work has been going on since the time of the Apostles.

For the first time, the Mission School included representatives not just from recently-established parishes with an official "mission" label, but from old and declining parishes in need of revitalization. We could say that these are parishes that need to "go back to being missions." But in another sense we could say that they should never have left being missions in the first place: that every Orthodox Christian community has a duty to remain a "mission" in the sense of continually trying to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Including old parishes was a reminder that it's not too late to remember that calling.

The most helpful thing about the Mission School was the opportunity to come together and share our thoughts and struggles in trying to do this work that the Lord has appointed for us. But even that won't be terribly helpful if it's something done only at an annual conference with different people attending each time. We're all in this together, whether we're in a small "mission parish" struggling to grow its numbers and put together money to buy a permanent space, or a well-established and

beautifully adorned and well-appointed cathedral. The Lord has appointed every part of the body: the new missions and older, established parishes all have their roles in helping one another proclaim the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Lord, and we'll do that much better if we can come together and share what we have to offer. More than anything else, the Mission School highlighted for me the importance of working together as a whole Church, and gave a glimpse of what that might look like.

So, to begin with, remember us, and pray for us. If you can, come and see the work that God is doing here. In the past year at Holy Apostles we've been blessed with a handful of baptisms and several people new to the area who've begun attending. One of our parishioners was ordained a deacon and another is a student at St Tikhon's Seminary. Our work among the local student population doesn't necessarily grow our numbers in the long term, but it's a contribution to the Church as we send people out spiritually grown and nourished, and a little more prepared to proclaim the Gospel wherever they relocate.

...every
Orthodox
Christian
community
has a duty
to remain a
"mission..."

At Holy Apostles we've accomplished much, by God's grace, but we have much still to accomplish: we've continued to beautify the rented space in which we worship, but we have a need to put down deeper roots. We have an active student fellowship at Cornell University, but we still need to keep growing our presence on campus as students come and go. And while we have a beautiful community of people who gather here on Sundays and feasts, we have plenty of empty seats as a reminder of the work still to be done in gathering the Lord's harvest. It's a comfort to know that this work is not just ours at Holy Apostles, but belongs to all of us in the Church, and by our united prayers, all of us are in it together. So whether you're near or far, join us in doing the Lord's work! The more we all pull together, the stronger we'll be.

Fr. Joel is the pastor of Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing, NY.

On the Retirement of Fr. Steven Belonick

by Protodeacon Andrew Boisvert

[Note: Fr. Steven Belonick retired on November 1, 2017 after 39 years of ministry. He served within our Diocese at Holy Transfiguration Church, Pearl River, NJ and Dormition of the Virgin Mary Church, Binghamton, NY; worked at St. Vladimir's Seminary, and finally was the pastor of Holy Ghost Church, Bridgeport, CT.]

When asked to write just a few words for *Jacob's Well* about my clerical experience and personal relationship with Fr. Steven Belonick, I agreed, but with much trepidation. Although Fr. Steven would never admit to it, Our Lord Jesus Christ poured out an over abundance of grace through His servant in the 17 years he pastored at the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Church in Binghamton, NY. I shudder to think the few words I write about my experience with him will suffice.

Attending church services regularly at Dormition Church was not a chore as it had been before my conversion into the Orthodox faith – it was a joy. It was a pleasure to listen to the choir sing so beautifully under the direction of first Fr. John Shimchick and then Michael Soroka. Of course, Fr. Steven's sermons were inspirational. Anyone who knows Fr. Steven will tell you that during services he prays and preaches from the top of his head to the bottom of his toes. During his sermons you can get the sense there is a point at which Fr. Steven stops talking and the Holy Spirit completely takes over for him. When "seekers" would come to visit, he would always encourage them to visit the other Orthodox churches in our area before they made a decision, but most often they would come back to our church and stay. He knew how to build a worshipping church community, and at one point during his tenure, we had one of the largest parishes in Upstate NY. He was instrumental in organizing the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Broome County Arena together with 5 other local Orthodox churches. It was an inspiring and glorious event!

Being inspired by Fr. Steven not only by his sermons, but also in the way he demonstrated the love of the faith through every aspect of his life, I answered the calling and entered into the diaconate program under his pastoral guidance through the OCA and Saint Tikhon's Late Vocations Program. It was always, of course, my hope that one day I would

be able to experience the beauty and the joy of serving our Lord at His altar table with my mentor.

Father Steven made sure I had a thorough understanding of Orthodoxy. I enjoyed learning about the Faith in the way in which only he could teach it. At times he would show me some of the papers he wrote when he was in seminary for such professors as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. John Meyendorff. Many of them received A grades! He stressed Patristics and emphasized the holy lives of the Saints and how we are called to emulate them.

Unlike the formal two year Diaconal Program we currently have in our Diocese, the Late Vocations program was not bound by any time table. As we had a big parish at the time and we both had young families, it took me approximately 8 years to finish the Program. Unfortunately before I was able to finish Fr. Steven accepted a position at St. Vladimir's Seminary. I was fortunate enough to be able to complete my studies with the help of Fr. Myron Oryhon. After my ordination, I was attached to Dormition Church and have been blessed to serve there ever since.

Serving alongside Fr. Steven at the Holy Ghost Church in Bridgeport, CT on October 22, 2017 was special. In the 34 years I've known him and in the 23 years we been associated with each other in the ministerial sense, we were never able to actually serve a complete Divine Liturgy together. So when my Matushka and I found out he was going to retire, we made up our minds in short order that we were going to Bridgeport. I was determined that nothing short of an act of God was going to stop us from being there! Serving alongside my mentor at the Divine Liturgy was as joyful an experience as I had hoped it would

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Fr. Steven, Protodeacon Andrew and Matushka Donna Boisvert

Carol Wetmore, 50 Years as Choir Director in Randolph, NJ

On Sunday, May 6, 2018 at Holy Trinity Church in Randolph, NJ, His Eminence, Archbishop Michael presented choir director Carol Wetmore with the St. Romanos Medal, one of only three awarded this year by the Holy Synod of Bishops for outstanding contributions to Orthodox liturgical music. Following the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy the parish hosted a banquet to celebrate Carol's 50 years of devotion to the choir and her central place in building up the life of the community. Fr David Fox unveiled the architectural drawings for a new bell tower being built in her honor.

Archbishop Michael and many others spoke warmly about Carol's dedication to the parish, the Diocese and Orthodox Church in America. Within the Diocese she serves as co-chair of the Commission on Liturgical Music, and has personally organized many music workshops to improve the musical skills of both singers and choir directors. Fr. John Jillions, the Chancellor of the OCA, was one of the many singers over the years who was welcomed into the choir. He was 16 when he moved to Randolph with his family, and Carol warmly drew him and his sisters into the choir. He noted Carol's valuable consultation work for the OCA as a Human Resources specialist. Later Carol took up a career as a social worker, providing hospice counseling for patients and families.



May God grant Carol many blessed years of continued singing and directing.

On the Retirement of Fr. Steven Belonick; continued from page 29

be. I felt at home. I felt at peace. It was good for me to be there.

Only God knows how much love we have in our hearts for Him and how hard we have struggled and worked to develop a deeper relationship with Him. Only God will judge how much we have ministered in His name. If an indication of this love happens to be how much we are loved by others, then a measure

of Fr. Steven's ministry as a priest has been the love of Christ that he has channeled to every parish and place he has ever served and the vast amount of love with which he in turn is loved by those whom he has served.

Truly we have been blessed to have him in our presence and the Church is much better for it.

Gift and Grace: The Spiritual Legacy of Orthodox Christians in America

<https://www.nynjoca.org/interviews.html>

Audio and Video Interviews With:

Fr. Sergei Glagolev • Fr. Thomas and Anne Hopko • Fr. Daniel and Dunia Hubiak
Fr. Sergius and Faith Kuharsky • Fr. John and Eugenia Nehrebecki • Fr. Paul and Mary Shafran
Fr. Stephen Siniari • Dr. Constantine and Arlene Kallaur • Dr. Albert Rossi

An Experience Beyond Words: Reflections on a Pilgrimage in the Holy Land

By a Pilgrim from the Diocese

On the Feast of Holy Pentecost, 2017, over thirty pilgrims from across our Diocese and other parts of the U.S. embarked on an unforgettable pilgrimage in the Holy Land. We traveled under the spiritual leadership of His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, with Archpriest Ilya Gotlinsky as our tour guide. What a time of year to undertake a pilgrimage – our thoughts constantly occupied with the fact that we were to tread the very trails and roads where the Apostles, newly emboldened by the fire of the Holy Spirit, set out to “turn the world upside down!”

Having landed in Tel Aviv, we boarded a tour bus bound for our hotel in Galilee. But, before we even got to the hotel, we encountered holiness – at the Tomb of St. George the Martyr, where all the pilgrims were anointed with the myrrh from his reliquary and with the Great Martyr’s blessing for the inauguration of our Pilgrimage. The heat, and the intensity of traveling in the arid conditions, caused us all to reflect upon what it must have been like for the Apostles as they traveled. We felt heat, thirst, and dust, like most of us had never experienced before.

In Nazareth, we beheld the holy well where the Archangel Gabriel announced the Good News of the Incarnation of the Son of God to the young Virgin Mary – decorated with the loving written prayer requests of pilgrims – and the preserved “cave home” (since most construction in first-century Palestine was of stone, wood being very rare) of the Theotokos, St. Joseph the Betrothed, and the young Messiah.

Visiting the place of Our Lord’s first miracle – Cana, the place of that divinely touched wedding – we were taken aback by the immensity of the “stone jars” – truly, massive casks – that were filled with the water turned wine! What a spectacular moment for the wedding guests to witness ... truly a sign for His disciples, as the Gospel of John says, to believe in Him.

Words can hardly convey the experience of walking and praying within the places where our Lord traveled and taught, and where His disciples were formed and fed with His Word. We had the great honor of visiting the newly unearthed site of a Jewish synagogue dated to the first century A.D., the first synagogue discovered

in Galilee. This was a place where Jesus may well have read and taught from the Torah! Upon the shore of the Sea of Galilee, we heard the Gospel read in the beautiful Roman church built upon the place where the Sermon on the Mount was preached – and in the magnificent, newly iconographed Orthodox Church of the Twelve Apostles, at the site where the Twelve were first called.

That experience was followed by boarding a wooden boat and pushing out into the Sea of Galilee – the very place where the Lord with his 12 “students” founded the “first seminary.” We listened to the Gospel and sang God’s praises, upon the same Sea from which the Disciples strained to pull in their heaving nets ... where Peter obeyed His Lord’s command to walk toward Him on the waves ... and from whose shore our Savior “pushed out a little” so that His life-giving teachings could be heard by thousands.

Interspersed with the incredible visits to the holy places from the life of Our Lord and His Mother were other inspiring encounters at sacred sites from both the Old and New Testaments. During the last few days of the pilgrimage we entered the country of Jordan. There, in addition to visiting the place along the Jordan River where it is believed that our Lord was baptized, we ascended Mount Nebo, from which Moses had his last and closest view of the Promised Land, which he was never to enter. We saw what remains of the palace where Saint John the Baptist was beheaded at the hands of the ruthless Herod. And, at the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, we visited the place where the tree that was used to make the Precious Cross of our Lord was grown from a triple seedling of cypress, pine, and olive.

One pilgrim remarked how much she had been looking forward to being in the place where Saints Martha and Mary had lived and met the Lord. “As a woman, I feel close to them both because sometimes I’m Martha and sometimes I’m Mary!” How awesome it was to stand in that very place where the grieving sisters met the Lord – where they challenged Him, even, for not coming while their brother was still alive – and yet He comforted them, explaining that this was taking place so that they, and you and I, might believe

in the Son of God. Archbishop Michael and our pilgrim clergy had been invited to serve the Liturgy there that morning ... but to our surprise, the nuns insisted that our pilgrims sing the responses! The headmistress of the Bethany Girls' School situated there held us all enthralled with her stories of struggle, zeal, and endurance – testimony to the strength that is required for the Girls' School to continue to function in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood, under a Jewish government. The Bethany Girls' School was the beneficiary of our Diocesan Charity Drive in 2014; and it was profoundly touching to see and hear first-hand the beautiful fruits of that effort. Our visit to the Bethany Girls' School, and prayerful remembrance of the great events in the Lord's life that happened there, culminated in a trip to the very tomb of Lazarus – whose stone walls soon reverberated with the joyous Troparion of the Raising of Lazarus, sung by our pilgrim “pick-up” choir!

If words are hard to find to describe sailing on the Sea of Galilee, then words fall away entirely – except for prayers and hymns – when one steps across the threshold of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. We were “thrice blessed” to visit the Holy Sepulchre on three different occasions during our visit to Jerusalem. It is hard to capture, except in actions – like walking in and immediately seeing the Anointing Stone, where the Body of Jesus lay after being taken down from the Cross, and where daily hundreds of pilgrims humbly prostrate themselves and spread their scarves on the ground to soak up the fragrant myrrh that still streams from the Stone. “This is what Heaven must smell like,” one of our pilgrims exclaimed.

Once inside the Sepulchre complex, you must climb many stairs to get to Golgotha ... being out of breath at the top, and even more out of breath on encountering the holiness of that place. There really is no way to describe it – you simply feel it, and you look into the eyes of your fellow-travelers and you know they feel it too. All you can think to do, is kneel. You have your turn – briefly – to enter Christ's Tomb and venerate the place where He lay, and where He rose ... You really don't want to leave; you just want to be there and let your heart be washed over by the holiness.

Going to the Tomb of the Lord is other-worldly. Especially there, in the Tomb, even for the brief moment between being allowed in and being guided out by the monk-sentry, one pilgrim related, “I felt like I was on one side of a curtain, touching it, and on

the other side was Heaven. I was that close to it, but not in it.”

The third time we visited the Holy Sepulchre, it was less crowded and we were able to stay for longer. At that point, words abandoned this pilgrim entirely – even spoken prayers were inadequate -- and we could only sing. And what a blessing! To be able to sing together the hymns that matched each location was one of the very best parts of the whole trip. We had the opportunity to sing “The Noble Joseph” at the Anointing Stone, “Let God Arise” and “Christ Is Risen” at His Tomb; and to sing the Troparia of every Feast and Saint whose church or home we visited. When we went into the Tomb, it felt like Pascha night feels when you stand in the darkness and you look at the iconostasis ... it is all dark and you see the first light on the priest's candle, and you hear the first tones of “Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior...”, when everything around you is poised to erupt into the joyous spectacle of the Feast of Feasts!

The field where the shepherds first heard the angels to the newborn King, is now the site of an Orthodox church, “Glory to God in the Highest!” are indeed the first words that spring to mind when you step inside! The church is exquisitely iconographed, from top to bottom, and has altars dedicated to the Angelic Powers, the Mother of God, and Saint Panteleimon the Unmercenary Healer. The Christmas hymns our pilgrims sang in that church that day truly came to life as we stood in the spot where the Infant Savior was hymned for the first time!

In the Basilica of the Nativity of our Lord – which has existed as a place of worship for at least 1700 years – hundreds of pilgrims at a time crowd into the Grotto under the main church, pushing to prostrate themselves on the ground and venerate the place where Jesus was born. In fact, humility could be seen as the “theme” of the Basilica of the Nativity. Everyone must pass through a half-height opening, called “the Door of Humility”, to enter the cathedral! Truly it is a vivid reminder how the Second Person of the Trinity humbled Himself to come among us.

The Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos was a very special place, arriving as we did at the end of a very hot and rigorous day. Descending the broad steps into the subterranean church, we knew we were somewhere truly awash in the grace of God and the prayers of centuries of pilgrims. Again, pilgrims must

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Is There A Musical Crisis in the Orthodox Church?

A Conversation with Benedict Sheehan and Robin Freeman

[Note: Benedict Sheehan, Director of Music, Assistant Professor of Liturgical Music at St. Tikhon's Seminary, offers a provocative blog entitled, "[The Music Stand](#)." We have invited Robin Freeman, Director of Music at St. Vladimir's Seminary to respond to his articles, "[A Musical Culture in Crisis](#)" and "[Addressing the Crisis](#)" (this second article is featured below).

Both articles are available at:

<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/musicstand/musical-culture-in-crisis/>

<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/musicstand/addressing-crisis/>

Part II of the Musical Culture in Crisis Series:

Orthodox Church music in America is collapsing. What can we do? The first step is simply to recognize that a collapse is taking place. However, before I propose any concrete solutions, let me enumerate some of the more obvious remedies that I think do not work.

1. We can't continue to lower our musical standards

Humans have a remarkable capacity to inure themselves to almost anything. When faced with bad Church singing, and being uncertain of what to do to address it, it's only natural for us to accept reality and lower our expectations. This process has been going on for a long time in many, many parishes. However, confronted as we are now with declining Church membership across jurisdictions, and a very real need to either grow or perish, we then have to face the almost impossible challenge of attracting outsiders to a liturgical experience that no reasonable person of good taste would take seriously. This problem does not only affect "old guard" parishes, but it touches missions and missionary dioceses as well, who either receive their standards of musical culture from "the old guard," or, what is much more difficult, must attempt to establish a musical practice of their own from scratch without clear models or leadership. The basic problem is that bad singing is a sign of an unhealthy parish, and it will necessarily stunt its growth. If our strategy for coping with mediocre Church music is just to accept it as normal, we will almost certainly lose in the end.

2. "Simpler" music doesn't solve anything

Often I hear people say, "We just need simpler music! Enough with the fancy stuff, let's get back to basics!" While it is always prudent to tailor your repertoire to match your ensemble's capabilities – in fact, I strongly advocate it – it's wrong to assume that doing so will solve fundamental musical problems. A choir that sings out of tune in 8-part music will continue to sing out of tune in unison. In fact, unison singing often makes defects in tuning more noticeable (a fact which may account for why some people think they don't like unison chant). Orthodox choirs, at least within the historically Slavic churches, are required to sing a cappella, which is a significantly more difficult task than singing with instrumental accompaniment. This means that there is a fairly high level of musicianship demanded of singers in order to sing even the most basic repertoire beautifully and accurately, and, more important (and elusive), in a way that inspires someone to pray.

3. "Congregational singing" won't solve anything either

There is probably no single theme I hear more often repeated in response to my concerns about Church music than, "if we just went to congregational singing, everything would be fine," or something along those lines. Without wading too deeply into what is a complex —and sometimes heated—topic, let me point out two basic difficulties in this line of thinking.

First, there is the fact that "congregational singing" is an inherently ambiguous term. What does the congregation sing? If the answer is "everything," then how do we manage services like Vespers or Matins that are primarily made up of changeable hymnography? Perhaps the answer is to supply everyone with service books or packets that include everything needed for a given day. Well and good, but be prepared for the host of practical challenges that necessarily accompany an effort of that kind, and in particular the need for someone competent to take the lead in assembling singable music in a usable form. If the answer is "some things," then how to establish order? And in that case, you still need a choir or a chanter that knows what they're doing.

Next, there is the problem of the congregation learning hymnography in the first place, and, though it may seem quite mundane, the practical problem of starting the singing in the services. Both of these things require capable leadership: one to know the hymns and have the ability to teach others to sing them (assuming they come to rehearsals); the other, the vocal strength and musical skill to start each hymn on the right pitch, in the right mode, and to carry dozens of other singers along with you who will inevitably be dragging half a beat behind. While this is not an impossible scenario, it hardly seems like a simple one, or one with a high chance of rendering satisfactory results. And it requires capable leadership, the lack of which is the whole point of this article. Of course, it may be that a congregation already knows a large body of liturgical repertoire and has been singing it for generations, in which case both aspects of the problem are somewhat mitigated. However, it is precisely these kinds of vibrant traditions that are suffering today from the demographic declines in many churches, as well as from the overall loss of musical culture

Here are three concrete ideas for how we might create jobs for Church musicians:

1. Have churches work together

No professional in America today – and trained musicians are professionals – would reasonably be expected to offer his or her services for less than \$40-50K per year. (Many Protestant and Catholic churches in fact pay significantly more than this.) Now obviously, this is a significant investment for a church, especially one that's struggling to pay even its priest a living wage. A possible solution, then, is to have a group of, say, four parishes band together and share the investment in a full-time music director. Perhaps one of the parishes—the best established of the four—could invest a little more, and act as home-base for the director, who would then over the course of each month travel around and work in each of the other three churches. As a full-time professional, his or her job description would include teaching musicians in each church, and helping them organize their music programs, so that the standard of singing in all four would gradually rise over time.

2. Establish full-time positions at the diocesan level

Throughout the Orthodox world, the bishop's cathedral has historically served to set a liturgical

standard for the rest of the diocese. Major cathedrals tended to staff their choirs with excellent singers (the Hagia Sophia in Justinian's time had 25 full-time singers on their payroll), and to employ directors who acted as musical leaders for the diocese as a whole. Such does not appear to be the norm in America today. Many of our cathedrals now have little more in terms of musical resources—and sometimes significantly less—than an average parish. One way to remedy this would be for dioceses to rally their resources and hire full-time diocesan music directors. These directors would be tasked with assembling a sufficient core of singers to maintain a high musical standard in all services at the cathedral. They could even, if necessary, travel with the bishop on his visits to other parishes, thus helping to ensure an appropriate level of liturgical beauty and solemnity wherever the bishop was present. In addition to leading music in services, the diocesan music director could also help provide liturgical and educational resources for the other churches in the diocese.

3. Take music education for children seriously

Music education in American public schools is weakening today, no question. However, we in the Orthodox Church should see this as an opportunity rather than a handicap. There are still lots of parents out there who want their kids to learn music—every Orthodox parent should want this—and we can help supply this market. Many private after-school music programs, both choral and instrumental, are flourishing right now because schools have dropped the ball. Orthodox churches, either individually or as a group, could undertake to create music programs for children that, in addition to offering employment for perhaps as many as several full-time employees, would have the added benefit of providing badly-needed musical education to our own children.

All of these are only ideas, and maybe none of them will work in some situations. However, it is absolutely crucial that we as Orthodox Christians in America start coming up with creative and practical solutions to our current musical problems. We have to do something. Given the trajectory of liturgical music in America over the last twenty-five years, I fear that, without a serious collective effort to reverse the trend, another twenty-five will take us to a point of no return. However, we can take a little a comfort in this: if musical standards are languishing at your church, you're not alone.

Robin Freeman

As a lifelong Church musician and as the Director of Music at St. Vladimir's Seminary, I'm grateful to Benedict for articulating the challenges facing Church music today. I think Benedict's identification and diagnosis of our problem – a shortage of Church musicians (and no jobs to attract new ones), shrinking congregations, and a general decrease in musical literacy – is spot on. His call to educate young people, as well as add more paid positions for musicians, can revitalize our liturgical music. I'd like to offer my own thoughts on this emerging challenge and share a few ways that St. Vladimir's Seminary is striving to meet the changing musical needs of today's Church.

It may seem obvious to many, but let me begin by affirming the foundational role of music for the Church. Music is integral to the celebration of our services, it possesses tremendous evangelical potential (remember how St. Vladimir converted to Orthodoxy because of the beautiful liturgy of Constantinople), and the Scriptures themselves urge us to praise God with our song.

Yet, like any good work, our music will proportionally reflect the labor and resources we invest. No farmer enjoys the fruits of the harvest without first sowing the seeds and tending the crop. So it is with Church music: revitalization is only possible if we invest our time, talents, and treasures – not only as individuals, but also as parishes and the larger Church. Just as the farmer harvests the bounty, our parishes will reap the harvest of thriving music programs, led by skilled conductors who possess great musical and liturgical knowledge.

Education must be at the center of any attempt to revitalize Church music, and as Benedict says, this starts with kids. It's been my experience that the best way to teach kids to read and sing in church is precisely by inviting them to do so while they are young. Much like serving in the altar, reading and singing in church offers young people practical training while also encouraging them to make a personal investment in their faith. By singing the words of the liturgy, children inscribe the sacred texts upon their hearts, which are not easily erased.

When they are older, the Church can encourage young musicians to attend seminary, which remains the best place to learn liturgical music by integrating classroom instruction into a full schedule of Church

services. Speaking of this integrated approach, Fr. Thomas Hopko often said that in the seminary chapel, we “workshop while we worship.”

Because incoming seminary students bring a range of musical skills, talents, and experiences with them – some even arriving with no musical background at all – we at St. Vladimir's have tailored our curriculum to meet students where they are when they arrive, providing a personalized approach to development. This fall, for example, we are offering a new course that focuses on teaching the basics of vocal production, pitch matching, and music reading. As students progress, they study the tones and other liturgical repertoire while honing their own vocal technique and musicianship. Advanced students study choral conducting and direct choirs in the chapel. Our goal is for ALL seminarians, regardless of their backgrounds, to fulfill their liturgical duties with confidence and competence – whether reading, singing, directing the choir, or serving as clergy – at seminary and beyond. No one is excluded; no one is left behind.

Importantly, seminary is not only a place for the preparation of future clergy. It is also a place where teachers, scholars, chaplains, and music directors are formed. And since the implementation of our fully-funded tuition plan, studying at St. Vladimir's has never been more affordable.

But not everyone can come to seminary, and in other cases, our alums are interested in refreshing knowledge and skills or refining what they've already learned. Recognizing this need, we've launched a new program that brings personalized musical instruction from our faculty right into the local parish. Our *Revitalizing Parish Music* program offers customized workshops for readers, singers, and conductors within their local parish setting. Workshops can be customized to meet for just a few hours, a full day, an entire weekend, or several sessions spanning months or years, all depending on the needs of the musicians and the parish. The workshop content is completely flexible depending on needs, and may include one-on-one lessons in voice or conducting; sessions for directors on topics like rehearsal technique, repertoire planning, or problem solving; or group sessions with choirs to work on ensemble skills. In this way we strive to bring a taste of the seminary experience to those “in the trenches,” providing each musician

Orthodoxy on Tap: NYC

by Spyridoula Fotinis

Orthodoxy in the midst of day to day nightlife. Orthodoxy on Tap. What does this mean?

“O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things.” In New York City, our daily reality challenges us to live the Gospel. We encounter hundreds of different people each day. We see homelessness in the seat next to us on the subway. We wrestle with the existence of God in a culture which rejects Him. We are called to meet Christ in the face of every person, in the sorrows and joys spinning around us. Are we

into the late hours of the night. The beauty of these relationships allows for the strengthening of the Church through new friendships that are continued outside of Orthodoxy on Tap and the joy of seeing a familiar face at a new parish.

We need to meet our young adults in the areas they know best. Orthodoxy on Tap is 60 young adults at the Olive Garden in Times Square singing in harmony “Happy Birthday” to another customer. Orthodoxy on Tap is crowding into a tight space at Maison Pickle to not miss a word from Dr. Rossi. It is listening with unfaltering attention to understand joy through the Cross. It is pinching pierogies while encouraging each other to participate in parish life and be a welcoming face to new Church members. Orthodoxy on Tap is meeting Christ in the mundane. Christ ministered to those at all intersections of humanity, to all people, in all areas. He met them in the moment where their hearts were open and ready for Him. The Divine meets us as authentic, broken humanity.

Young adults in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. And within the short time since its creation, Orthodoxy on Tap has had

a profound impact on my life and the lives of others. It has deepened my own Faith and has allowed me to meet amazing people who are now among my closest friends. We hope and pray that this ministry continues to grow in its current locations as well as expand to new locations throughout the diocese, and the country, and support our young adults in their continuous struggle for Christ. As Orthodoxy on Tap is still in its beginning stages in New York City, it is vital for parishes to support this new ministry by encouraging their young adults to attend events near them or establish their own.

Orthodoxy on Tap can be reached at: orthodoxyontapnyc@gmail.com and check out its soon to be published website (coming soon) : orthodoxyontapnyc.com



as young adults prepared to respond to this call in a world of “nones,” of blind trust in worldly affairs and secular matters?

Life as a young adult is difficult. Many of us enter college far from our home parishes and graduate from strong and supportive OCF chapters with little to look forward to. Orthodoxy on Tap is a response to filling the void of an Orthodox young adult community. It allows us to come together in an exciting new venue and relaxed environment to grow new friendships and strengthen our Orthodox Faith. At each event, a speaker presents on a topic pertinent to the life of young adults such as friendships and relationships, understanding how in difficult life situations we can draw closer to Christ, and the importance of Pan-Orthodoxy. After questions and answers, the rest of the evening is filled with fellowship, often lasting

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with education, immediate application, and guided feedback.

In a recent interview for the Sacred Arts Initiative at St. Vladimir's, the Orthodox priest and composer Fr. Ivan Moody said, "We have these tremendous riches... and they should be a source of creative dynamism, we can't have the idea that we live in a museum... they must be the impetus for creation." So while we continue the task of music education, we must also strive to expand our English repertoire (as Benedict has done with his new publication *A Common Book of Church Hymns: Divine Liturgy*), compose new music, and produce new recordings (like the CD of music for

women's choir by St. Vladimir's Seminary Chorale, "Every Day I Will Bless Thee.").

I want to thank Benedict again for initiating this conversation and offering plausible solutions. Our Church has faced many difficulties during the course of her history. There are many challenges before us, but there is also incredible opportunity if we are willing to invest ourselves. So let us heed the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: "And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).

An Experience Beyond Words: Reflections on a Pilgrimage in the Holy Land; continued from page 32

bend humbly in order to enter the small altar where her empty tomb resides. One pilgrim relates, "I poured out my heart to her there; but like your mom already knows when you are upset or in need, I was certain that she already knew what I was going to pray for."

Alongside all these ancient places, visited by millions of pilgrims over 20 centuries, new discoveries are still taking place! We were privileged to join a young Russian Orthodox Christian archaeologist who has discovered the place where the Apostle Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch! A church had been built at the place, and when its ruins were uncovered, so were the bones of dozens of martyrs – felled by Persian invaders in the seventh century. His Eminence led us in the first memorial service for these heroes of the Faith that had been celebrated in the 13 or more centuries that the site has lain underground!

This reflection has taken many words to say what words truly cannot contain: the unforgettable experience of a journey in the footsteps of our Lord, His Mother, and His Apostles. Enthused one of our travelers, "It may take the rest of my life to comprehend the experience of spending just one minute kneeling in the Tomb of Christ!" Indeed, it is this pilgrim's hope that the reader will be inspired to seek an opportunity to experience this pilgrimage personally. Having walked where Jesus did, you will never hear the Gospels the same way again ... because you will see them unfold in your mind's eye. You will have shared with innumerable Saints and sojourners an experience which no travelogue is adequate to describe. May each of you be blessed with this incredible opportunity!

On Saturday, March 17, Drs. David and Mary Ford led a retreat at Holy Cross Orthodox Church, Medford, NJ. Dr. Mary spoke on bearing trials and tribulations with encouragement from the *Book of Revelation*, and Dr. David approached this same theme giving many quotes from St. John Chrysostom's letters to St. Olympia. Then after Vespers at 3:30 PM, Dr. Mary led a session for ladies only on dealing with ungodly thoughts (logismoi), and Dr. David led one for men only on his hand-out called "26 Ways to Enhance the Glory of your Marriage."

Audio from their Retreat is available at:
holycrossmedford.org



Review of “Becoming Truly Human”

By Fr. Sergius Halverson

Jacob's
well

Fall 2018

When I think of Orthodox Christianity as portrayed in American movies, I think of weddings. *The Deer Hunter* (1978), has its famous wedding scene, filmed at St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland, with a full choir and a packed church, depicting the long-gone “glory days” of Midwestern steel towns. Conversely, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), depicts the unceremonious baptism of the fiancée in an inflatable kiddie pool in an otherwise empty church. Whether Orthodox Christianity is portrayed sympathetically or critically, it is usually relegated to a supporting role in major movies. So, when I learned that “Becoming Truly Human” (2017) could be purchased on Amazon streaming video, I eagerly sat down to watch a feature film in which Orthodox Christianity has the leading role.

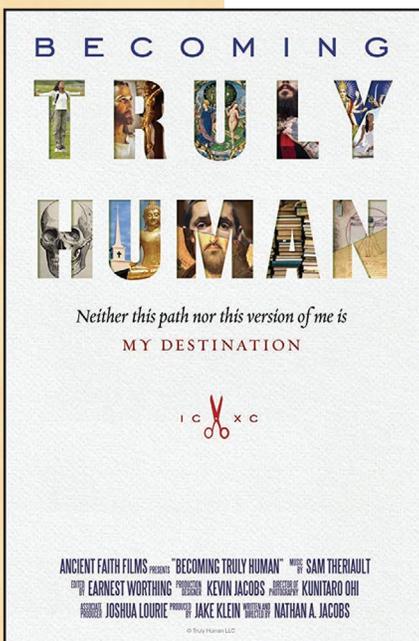
film is when she looks straight at you and says, “I’m sad because I want to believe there is something but there is nothing showing me that there is...When you die you just go in a box and you’re done.” All of the “Nones” are earnest, thoughtful and deeply sympathetic characters. I found myself liking all of them, and wishing that I could join in with their group discussions. One thing I like most about the discussion with the “Nones” is that it models a critical element of ministry. Nowhere in the film does Mr. Jacobs “get preachy” with his guests, nor does he present them with “all the answers.” Rather he asks questions, thoughtfully listens, and gives them the space to tell their stories. He gives us a beautiful icon of how to engage with, and minister to people who question faith.

Interwoven between the accounts of the “Nones” is Mr. Jacobs’ account of his own journey from “None” to Orthodox Christian. We hear the story of a man who struggled with the Christianity of his youth, only to later discover a deeper and more powerful experience of God in Orthodox Christianity. The Jacobs family also shares the remarkable story about adopting a little boy from an Eastern European orphanage where he had languished, starved of food and love, until he is embraced by his new family. The Jacobs family expresses one of the film’s most powerful theological themes as they speak eloquently and concretely about encountering Christ in the neighbor who is in need. (Matthew 25)

The third story develops the idea of encountering Christ in the neighbor through two metaphors. First, Mr. Jacobs creates a collage using pictures of people and artwork that have been important to him in his journey of faith. As the collage takes shape, the abandoned building that serves as his impromptu studio is slowly transformed into a humble little chapel, and ultimately we see that the collage is an icon of Christ. Mr. Jacobs has discovered Christ in and through the various people that he has known and loved throughout his life. Finally, the climax of the film revolves around a large rectangular panel with a gold circle in the center. After preparing it in his studio, he takes it out to an urban setting where he encounters a wide array of people. I’m not going

Writer and director Nathan Andrew Jacobs (who somewhat confusingly introduces himself as Basil) tells three stories in “Becoming Truly Human”: the story of the “Nones,” people who are unaffiliated with any organized religion; the story of his personal journey from leaving the Christianity of his childhood, to becoming a husband and father who, along with his wife and children are received into the Orthodox Church; and the story of encountering Christ in the neighbor. The three stories are told through first-rate filmmaking and sumptuous cinematography.

The “Nones”—four women and three men, all Millennials—tell their stories in group discussions led by Mr. Jacobs and in individual segments where the “Nones” look straight at us, telling us how and why they left their Christian faith. These solo segments are all filmed in an abandoned church: a striking metaphor for the abandonment of faith. Tiffany, one of the “Nones,” seems to be on the verge of tears as she describes her Christian upbringing, explaining that because nobody was willing or able to answer the difficult questions she had, she ultimately lost her faith. One of the more chilling moments in the



to spoil the film by attempting to describe the last four minutes of the film, but every time I see it I'm almost moved to tears.

Overambition may be the one fault of "Becoming Truly Human." It is not always clear how the three stories connect and at times it feels as if the film moves too slowly and perhaps a case could be made for the three stories to be separate features on their own. Also, I'm not sure how a non-Christian or a non-Orthodox viewer would receive this film. The story of the "Nones" which feels unfinished, perhaps by design, is an important corrective to any sense of triumphalism that Orthodox Christian viewers may have when watching a film that lavishes praise on the Church. Yes, this faith is beautiful and true, but how is it that there are so many people who have either never heard of it, or want nothing to do with it?

This film may not speak to everyone. Orthodox Christianity is far too large to be fully captured in one person's artistic vision. However, "Becoming Truly Human" helps us to see our humanity by seeing Christ in the neighbor. As with other films "Becoming Truly Human" presents Orthodox Christianity in terms of marriage. But, this film presents the mystical marriage of Christ and His Church; we see the love of the Bridegroom who gives His life for the unfaithful Bride: sinful humanity. "Becoming Truly Human" left me asking myself asking hard questions: Do I love people who have lost their faith? Do I love the innocent, the vulnerable and the abandoned? Do I love my neighbor as God loves me? I can only hope to see more films like this.

Postscript: During the Spring, 2018 semester, Fr. Halverson taught what he believes is the first course on Orthodox Apologetics at St. Vladimir's Seminary. It combined traditional classroom work with fieldwork in which students were required to engage in dialogue with people who had left their Christian faith, are atheists, or who identify as "spiritual but not religious." He shared these comments about the course:

One of the requirements for the course in Apologetics was for the students to engage in real time discussions with a non-believer: an atheist, someone who has left their Christian faith, or who is self-described as "spiritual, but not religious." Before the students began this fieldwork, we developed a framework for personal and humble Orthodox apologetics, in which the emphasis began with being a witness to the truth of Christ, or to use a phrase popularized by Dr. Albert Rossi, "being a healing presence." Then they focused on refuting challenges to Christian faith. During the sessions, students asked their dialogue partners questions about their experiences with Christians, Christianity, religious faith, and how they understood their own spirituality.

The responses to these questions served as the starting point for the dialogue.

Most of the students were nervous when they began the field work, wondering what kind of response they would receive from the people they engaged. Just about all of the students, however, reported back that their dialogue partners were surprisingly honest – to the point of being blunt – but were respectful in sharing their doubts, concerns, or oppositions to Christianity. Interestingly, however, even though all of those interviewed regarded Christianity with hostility or indifference, they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about their experience with faith. Some even expressed their

desire to continue the discussions after the course ended. This was a major takeaway for the students, who were pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to engage non-believers in meaningful and often quite substantive discussion. The students concluded that when engaging a non-believer with humility and respect, and when the concerns of opposition to faith of the non-believer are taken seriously, then it is possible to cultivate a relationship of trust and honesty that is an important first step in Orthodox Christian apologetics.

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Glory and Mercy

by Dr. Mary K. Farag-Gall

“Glory” and “mercy.” We say these words repetitively, frequently when we gather for Church services. Why do we repeat the words “glory” and “mercy” so incessantly? What does glory have to do with mercy? What does mercy have to do with glory? In a service of Vespers alone, I counted sixty-one instances of “glory,” and sixty-two instances of “mercy.”¹ In a relatively short service, we hear “glory” and “mercy” repeated about sixty times each!

Bear in mind that in the tally of “glory,” each “alleluia” is included. With every “alleluia,” we send up glory to God. “Alleluia,” like “amen,” is one of the very few words that we have retained from Hebrew worship. “Alleluia” means “Glory to God.”

“Glory to God.” “Lord have mercy.” These words are incessantly on our lips together when we gather as a church. Let us contemplate on what “Glory to God” and “Lord have mercy” have to do with each other, especially when we gather as church.

Our forbears in the fourth and fifth centuries thought about glory and mercy a great deal: luminaries like St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. John Chrysostom. In the time of the great Church leaders we look up to so much, churches were lavishly adorned. Not only cathedrals in

urban centers like Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) in Constantinople, but even rural churches, churches far away from the imperial cities, were lavishly adorned. Entire ceilings would be gilt with gold. Floors would be covered in painstakingly laid mosaic. Walls would be lined with marble and/or detailed paintings of nature, civilization, scenes of Scripture, great heroes of the Faith. Not a single square inch would be left without a thought. The highest craft, the highest care was also devoted even the very structures of churches. Architects and engineers shaped the sanctuary like a flower sometimes. The entire church could be a multi-layered octagon. Even the dome could be shaped like as an octagon.

What were these Christians of late antiquity doing lavishly adorning their churches? Were Christians squandering the wealth of the faithful on ornamentation? Didn't Christians care about charity? Didn't Christians think the needy came first?

These exquisitely built churches were built for God, but these churches were built for the needy, too. Before we go into what this means, we need to start using the very words that people like St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John Chrysostom used to describe a church. Fourth and fifth century Christians would refer to a church building as a house, a house for God and His saints to dwell in, to live in.

What should God's house, God's living quarters, look like? Well, we know God to be the greatest benefactor. The gifts of God abound in ways we cannot even imagine. We also know God to be all-glorious. Glory, light beaming, glittering beyond what our eyes can handle. The house of someone like that is going to be infinitely extravagant.

When a church would be inaugurated, when everyone would gather to cut the red tape so-to-speak and celebrate the establishment of a house of God, poets would compose verses and hymns for the occasion. These poets would try to convey in words how the newly-built church expresses the glory of God. One poet wrote that the gold and the mosaic glitters and shines so much, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between day and night in the church!

During the Advent season, we sing, “O House of Ephratha / The Holy City / The Glory of the Holy Prophets / Beautify the house / In which the Divine One is born.” Beautify the house. Beautify the house. This was serious business for architects, engineers, artisans of all kinds, the laity, the clergy, etc. All took pains to beautify the house.

But beautifying the house wasn't just about giving glory to God. Theologians of old reveled in polyvalence of meaning, layers and layers and layers of meaning when it comes to God and His Church, endless layers of meaning.

Beautifying the house also meant giving the church building a voice. Letting the church building



itself declare the glory of God to all those who enter. Letting the church building itself invite the faithful to reflect God's glory. Literally the writings on the walls of churches in late antiquity speak to readers. For example, the writing on a church that was restored says: "You see the church formerly in ruins now bright with God's glory." "You reader, see the church bright with God's glory." Another church says: "I am the house of the Trinity." When we enter the church, the church literally declares to us who the church is: "I am the house of the Trinity." Churches declared to churchgoers what it meant to reflect God's glory. See the golden ceiling? Reflecting God's glory means luminosity, spreading light. See the Saints on the walls? Reflecting God's glory means enduring the suffering, carrying the crosses, as our saintly forbears painted on the walls did. See Christ enthroned in majesty? Reflecting God's glory means living our lives in strict alliance with Christ the King. When entering God's house, we really should wonder whether we are on earth or in heaven.

So one way of making this educational point of how we ought to reflect God's glory was to surround the faithful with walls that spread this message in many ways: architecturally, visually, textually, and so on. Another way of making this point of how we ought to reflect God's glory took a very different form. Imagine that you shared in the building of a church from its foundation to its completion. Imagine the day that the church is inaugurated, consecrated to Christ? Picture the celebrant standing at the ambo to give the homily. What does the celebrant say after all the toil and money and sacrifice that you contributed to the building of a most glorious house of God? Imagine that the celebrant says, "Do you see these walls so finely adorned? They don't matter. Why? Because this isn't the true house of God. Each and every one of you is the true house of God that must be built up. You are the house that must be beautified." Imagine. How would this kind of comment make us feel at such a special moment in the parish's life?

"These finely adorned walls. They don't matter." It may strike us as odd for the Church leaders of old to say such a thing, and, above all, to say such a thing when a newly built church is being consecrated, inaugurated, showcased for all to enter and see the fruits of great human and divine labor. But St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and many of the luminaries we admire, they were highly trained rhetoricians. They used occasions and their homilies

on those occasions in the most skillful ways to reach the hearts of their listeners. St. Augustine of Hippo, of all the Church Fathers, was the one most recognized as a highly skilled rhetorician. Just before St. Augustine became a Christian, he occupied the highest-ranking post in rhetoric. One of St. Augustine's sermons for the consecration of a church succinctly captures what theologians in the East were also saying in their homilies for church consecrations. St. Augustine says that the building and dedication of a holy house is an image of what is happening and will happen to us. We in our lives right now are in the building phase, but at the end of the age, at the end of time, we, as a church community, will be consecrated, inaugurated as a house of God. In our formation in this world as Christians, and now I quote St. Augustine directly, "[we] are being chipped and chiseled, straightened out, planed by the hands of carpenters and masons" (Sermon 336.1).² Each of us are stones being shaped to fit together as a community. What binds us together? What makes us a building that won't collapse and fall into ruin? Love. Love is the mortar that cements us stones together, so we fit, so we make up a house of God that will not tumble, that will not collapse.

But is that it? We are to build beautiful churches as an educational image for the faithful to imitate? And, going back to what we said earlier, we are to build beautiful churches as thank-you cards to God? No, the story doesn't end there. Remember the layers and layers of meaning, the polyvalence.

This is where mercy comes in. We constantly ask the Lord for mercy. Lord have mercy. What does "Lord have mercy" have to do with "Glory to God"? We give glory to God because God is the merciful gift-giver. We don't deserve God's gift, but in God's mercy, he gives us gifts anyway. Giving glory to God is one way of saying thank you. Especially for the greatest of God's gifts to us, the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. Our forbears knew a key insight very well: we have to be shown mercy and recognize (think thank-you card) that we have been shown mercy, to be merciful.

Let us consider some examples. This is where St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John Chrysostom take the limelight. When St. Basil of Caesarea was trying to build the first hospital – the first hospital in world history – St. Basil was met with a lot of resistance. To shore up support, his friend St. Gregory Nazianzen preached a homily called "On Love for the Poor." A very long, but masterfully crafted homily that will

bring you to tears. St. Gregory says, “Nothing so serves God as mercy because no other thing is more proper to God, whose mercy and truth go before, and to whom we must demonstrate our capacity for mercy” (Oration 14.5).³ St. Gregory insists that mercy “defines God” and “comes from God” (14.9).⁴ As images of God, mercy should also characterize us and should also come from us. In St. Gregory’s words, “Come to be a god to the unfortunate by imitating God’s mercy” (14.26).⁵ When we show mercy to others, we give glory to God by being little gods, little Christs. To use St. Gregory’s words again, “If he who mocks the poor insults his maker, then he glorifies the Creator, who looks after His creature” (14.36).⁶ Those who care for God’s creatures glorify God the Creator. So St. Gregory shows us why it is necessary for us to be merciful to others and how our acts of mercy to others are simultaneously acts of glorification to God.

Now we turn to St. John Chrysostom. If St. Gregory Nazianzen shows us how mercy is a kind of glory, then St. John Chrysostom shows us how glory can be a kind of mercy. We said already that the extravagant gifts given to beautify God’s house were given to offer glory to God and manifest God’s glory on earth. St. John Chrysostom took this very seriously. A donor had given slabs of marble to beautify a church in Constantinople. Later, St. John Chrysostom was trying to build a hospice for lepers and needed funds. St. John Chrysostom knew that the marble was set aside to offer glory to God and manifest God’s glory on earth. St. John Chrysostom’s intentions were similar to those of the donor. To give glory to God and manifest God’s glory on earth, not by beautifying God’s house, but by showing mercy to members of God’s household, specifically lepers. So, St. John Chrysostom sold the marble and used the funds to begin building a hospice for lepers. It is not that St. John didn’t think the beautification of God’s house was important. After all, St. John was bishop of Constantinople, leader of quite extravagant churches indeed. St. John also believed firmly that a home for lepers was another kind of house for God. The marble set aside for the glory of God would give glory to God through the mercy the marble provided for lepers.

At the time, as today, it was not easy to redirect funds. Today, if we write a check and indicate in the memo that the money should be used for making an icon of the Theotokos, the money has to be used for this purpose. Likewise, the marble earmarked for use in a church, had to be used that way. St. John

Chrysostom was a radical advocate for mercy toward the needy. And lepers were the neediest of the needy. St. John Chrysostom’s hospice for lepers never got finished. Nearby landowners didn’t want the hospice built. Nearby landowners didn’t want lepers using the same river-water that flowed through their properties. So, when these landowners found out about the marble, they were able to have their way. It is not that these landowners wanted the marble to manifest the glory of God in a church. These landowners did not want the glory of God manifest in lepers.

In antiquity, Church leaders were faced with the problem of people being willing to beautify the church, but not give to the needy. Also problematic is when people are willing to give to the needy, but not to beautify the church. At the heart of both problems is the matter of giving glory to God. When I beautify God’s house, but do not give to the needy, God’s household, am I truly giving glory to God? Or am I giving glory to myself? When I give to the needy, to God’s household, but do not beautify God’s house, am I truly giving glory to God? Or am I giving glory to myself? God’s house and God’s household are one and the same. St. John Chrysostom knew this well and tried to live it out.

“Beautify the house,” we sing. “Beautify the house,” we are commanded. What does it mean to beautify the house? Our forebears teach us that it means to give glory to God in manifold ways. To manifest the glory of God by the gifts of thanksgiving we offer in God’s house for God’s mercy. To manifest the glory of God visually for all to see in God’s house. To manifest the glory of God in the mercy we show others. With every gift of glory and mercy we let Christ’s hands chip away at us. We let Christ’s hands chisel us. We let Christ’s hands straighten us out. We let Christ’s hands form us into shapely stones. Stones that can be mortared with love and stand strong together to the eternal glory of Christ our merciful Savior.

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Footnotes

¹ Advent Vespers, as served at Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ on December 10, 2017.

The Tower Founded on The Word; continued from page 44

the people and everything and everybody who went before us, or even the children who'll come after us.”

Allie said, “Somebody found out I could read music and pretty soon I got drafted to sing in the choir. That’s where I really got to know Nina. She sang alto. I sang soprano. I listened, and I watched, and I learned. She was the church to me and she helped me find my place in the church.”

The tower which you see building is myself, the Church.

Allie saw the older woman participate in all the Church prescribed: Baptisms, Chrismations, Confession, Eucharistic preparation, the Fasts and Feasts, the life of the Liturgy, kindness to others, forgiveness, hospitality, struggling to live like she really believed and hoped in the life of the world to come.

Nina told Allie, “I got one foot in this world, and I ain’t in a hurry, but I am curious to see where the other one ends up.”

One day after Liturgy the priest talked with Allie about Baptism. He suggested Nina be her Godmother.

“When Nina agreed,” Allie said, “I knew I had made the right decision. I wanted to honor her and by asking her, I also sort of wanted to say, ‘This community. These people. This church. This is where I want my home to be.’”

Those square white stones which fitted exactly into each other, are apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons, who have lived in Godly purity, and have acted as bishops and teachers and deacons chastely and reverently to the elect of God. Some of them have fallen asleep, and some still remain alive. And they have always agreed with each other, and been at

peace among themselves, and listened to each other. On account of this, they join exactly into the building of the tower.

In uniting herself to the faith of the Church, Allie knew she had united herself to the faith of all those gone before: apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and all the saints she had heard mentioned by the priest in the prayers of the Liturgy. She sought God and through Nina and the people of faith, He had made it her faith too.

“Nina stood with me.” Allie said. “The priest stood us at the door of the church facing the street and she spat on the devil with me. She held on to me real tight as we said the Creed. I was sort of shouting in defiance and crying at the same time. My voice wobbled all over the place. The priest poured oil into her hands and anointed me with it. And when it was all done, me and her were part of the same Eucharistic assembly. The same cup.”

For the tower was founded on the Word of the Almighty and glorious Name and it is kept together by the invisible power of the Lord.

Nina had a Prosphora stamp, a seal for imprinting the Holy Bread. Her family gave it to Allie when Nina died.

“I started baking Holy Bread because of her.” Allie said. “I loved the way she used to talk about it. She used to say that when she kneaded the dough for it, she saw her mother’s hands. When I make it, I see hers.”

Quotes from The Shepherd of Hermas, a Christian work of the late 1st or mid-2nd century, considered canonical Scripture by some of the early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus.

Glory and Mercy; continued from page 42

² Translation: Edmund Hill, trans., *The Works of Saint Augustine*, part 3, vol. 9 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), p. 266.

³ Translation: Martha Vinson, trans., *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 42.

⁴ Translation: Vinson, *Select Orations*, p. 45.

⁵ Translation: Vinson, *Select Orations*, p. 59.

⁶ Translation: Vinson, *Select Orations*, p. 68.

The Tower Founded on The Word

by Fr. Stephen Siniari

She said to me, “Do you see something great?”

Nina was like the mother of our parish. She used to say, “If an angel came and said he had a different God from the God of our people? I wouldn’t believe him.”

She conformed her life to this faith. Not the other way around. There were bad days too. Times when she lost her temper with people coming into the Liturgy making noise, times when she criticized the church board or the priest.

Tears were in her eyes when she talked about her husband. Losing her son was one of her greatest heartaches. Despite all that, Nina struggled to live each day in an authentic relationship with everyone she met, with God, and with the people at the parish.

She said the choir sounded better on a rainy day. If she could have explained, why, she wouldn’t have been the favorite Sunday School teacher of half the adults who comprised the parish.

When Allie met Nina, the classics student, said, “She was funny and warm. I liked her right away. She’d talk to anybody. She was feisty, full of life, didn’t shy away from telling people when she disagreed with them. She reminded me of my own mom in that way.”

When Allie was nineteen, somehow she got it into her head that she should go to church, so she went.

She loved her parents. Neither of them had ever found a way to believe in God. They loved their daughter. If there was something more, they wanted Allie to be free to find it.

The sky was threatening the morning Allie climbed the long flight of iron stairs to the platform and boarded the elevated train that started out on the city’s western edge. A pre-recorded announcer’s voice told her: “Doors are closing.” The spray-painted

procession of outdated cars headed east through the underground portal that descended beneath the dark river and the maze of downtown towers.

Allie sat alone in the long narrow car that swayed under the dim overhead light. Outside, the black tunnel went zipping by. The basket-weaved seat was stiff and yellowed. The draft that chilled her ankles and the back of her neck had its own peculiar smell, like an estuary at low tide, like an occupied burrow, like a furrow in a graveyard at midnight. From the other side of the smeared window her blurred reflection stared in at her like a Byzantine icon in the subterranean ether.

The battered rolling stock rattled up and out from beneath the surface and returned again to track above the busy streets. The sky was gray but Allie was glad to see it. She looked down on the grim stretch of avenue called the Tunnel, the drug infested underbelly where the city shrouded its walking dead. The end of the line came quickly.

“Doors are opening.” The voice was still in her ears when she walked out of the rain and into the little church. The voice seemed a sign of something hopeful in Allie’s mind.

Nina took Allie around the temple describing everything from the purpose of the candles in the narthex to the name of each person on the iconostasis.

“Everything she showed me in the church seemed strange, and exotic, and strangely familiar.” Allie said. “Nina made me feel at home.”

Nina told Allie, “Trust in God and entrust yourself to God, person to person.” But at the same time, Nina told her, “It’s more than just me and God in our own little church, detached from

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Jacob's well

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