NATIVITY FAST 2026

Begins Nov. 15th

40 Days Before the Birth of Christ

Saint Barbara Dec. 4th and the tradition of Wheat

The Orthodox Church has a rich history of traditions that are unique to places with a strong local devotion to a particular saint. These devotional practices serve to enrich our everyday lives with the cyclical life of the Church. How better to teach children about the saints than through hands-on activities that revitalize the stories of their lives? Rather than allowing these traditions to fade into the forgotten past, we should make them an everyday reality. **Here then is the tradition of wheat for St. Barbara's Day:**

St. Barbara's Day is celebrated on December 4th. St. Barbara, born in the third century in present day Lebanon, was the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus who kept her locked into a tower to preserve her from the suitors of the outside world. Unbeknownst to her father, Barbara converted to Christianity by encountering the beauty of God's Truth in the nature she saw from her tower window.

When Dioscorus found a rich suitor who he believed to be acceptable, Barbara refused to marry him, having consecrated herself to Christ. One day, upon returning from a long journey, Dioscurus found that Barbara had had a third window built into the tower in honor of the Holy Trinity. Seeing this her father drew his sword in anger, determined to kill his once beloved child. St. Barbara jumped out of her tower window and fled. Upon being captured she was tortured for days on end by means of switches, lashes, iron hooks, the rack, torches, red-hot pincers and hammers. But every morning her torturers would return to find her healed. In order to put an end to it all, her father claimed the honor of cutting off the head of his daughter, who had scorned the gods. It is said that upon returning home, Dioscurus was struck by lightning.

From one of the details of this story, the tradition of St. Barbara's Wheat was born. It is said that when fleeing persecution, Barbara ran through a newly planted field of wheat.

As she ran, the wheat grew instantly, covering her path and protecting her from those chasing her.

And so, on December 4th, Orthodox and Catholics would plant wheat seeds in honor of St. Barbara. When the wheat had sprouted it would be used as decoration, either near the family nativity scene or on the Christmas table. The wheat seeds were planted in three small saucers in France and the Ukraine to represent the Holy Trinity.

Legend has it that if the wheat germinates well and is prolific, the year's harvest will be plentiful. There is a traditional saying in Provençal: "Quand lou blad vèn bèn, tout vèn bèn !": If the wheat goes well, everything goes well!

Celebrating St. Nicholas' Day. Dec. 6th



Leave your shoes out by your door or a place in your home on the evening before his feast day. His feast is Dec. 6th, so on Dec. 5th put your shoes out and perhaps St. Nicholas will fill them with an orange or an apple and a gold chocolate coin. Why Oranges? In the Slavic areas this sweet fruit was rare and would have been a special treat years ago. Why chocolate gold coins? This is one way to honor and remember the holy Nicholas' selfless giving to those in need, especially when he helped a father care for three daughters and gave away all the riches he inherited from his parents. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of our ACROD Diocese. He defended true theology at the 1st Ecumenical Council by shutting down the impious Arius' false teachings about who Jesus is. Arius believed because we celebrate the birth of Christ on Christmas Day then Jesus must have had a beginning rather than being pre-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy defends that Jesus is pre-eternal and equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, without change, without beginning when entering into humanity at the Annunciation (March 25th) and born in the flesh on Christmas 9 months later on (Dec. 25th) Arius' teachings were rejected and St. Nicholas' defense celebrated. Consider reading his story and celebrating this holy father and defender of children, sailors and many others who honor him.

Romanian St. Nicholas Tradition:

Loredana Savu of our parish shared there is a tradition in Romanian with St. Nicholas day: St. Nicholas leaves children who don't clean their shoes first before putting them out! A stick!... but a decorated stick so they are not devastated. She shared these photos from Romania where they can be found at a local store in Romania! So children… clean those shoes before putting them out for St. Nicholas :)



Bring a Pair of Shoes to Church and leave them by the front door… maybe St. Nicholas will fill them this year… that goes for all ages! :)


Saint Nicholas
humble · quiet · generous
Fr Jonathan Bannon 12·5·20


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The Liturgical Year
January 2027 and Great Lent

Book Store will be ready for Nativity Fast



Check out the seasonal updates in our parish bookstore as we prepare for the 40 Day Nativity Fast Nov. 14 - Dec. 25th. A solid plan for engaging with the fast is being faithful with daily prayer and scripture reading. Attending Confession as a humble approach to exploring our hearts, and asking God for forgiveness and strength. Reading a spiritual book. Pick 1 book and stick too it. Ask some parishioners who have been Orthodox for a few years what they have enjoyed. And then there is the beloved Psalm Reading Group.

Psalm Reading Group for Nativity Fast

Reading the Psalms has been a tradition valued by countless Christians for centuries. In Orthodoxy the 150 Psalms are organized into 20 groups called Kathismata. If 20 people sign up and each person reads a different Kathismata each day, then the entire book of Psalms is being offered by our parish every day of the Nativity Fast. Each Kathismata is about 6 Psalms a day.
Sign up for your spot on the Psalm Reading Group.

Why a Psalm?

By St. Basil the Great

A psalm implies serenity of Soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For, it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider as an enemy him with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, love.

A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons; a means of inducing help from the angels, a weapon in fears by night, a rest from the toils of the day, a safeguard for infants, an adornment for those at the height of their vigour, a consolation for the elders, a most fitting ornament for women. It peoples the solitudes; it rids the market places of excesses; it is the elementary exposition of beginners, the improvement of those advancing, the solid support of the perfect, the voice of the Church. It brightens feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God. For, a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone. A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, the spiritual incense.

2027 Traditions
Community Minded Events

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JANUARY

- Home Blessing Season
January 7th through February 28th:
Schedule a home blessing with me during coffee hour in person or call.

Why a home blessing? We bless to set apart for God. A child or person is baptized and chrismated so as to be given to God, cleansed, illumined, anointed as a holy vessel of God. A home is a little church, a place of humility, prayer, fellowship. We bless the home like a spring-cleaning with newly blessed Holy Water inviting the Holy Spirit to dwell and protect as the new year begins.

How to prepare:
A white cloth on a table to symbolize the white robe early Christians wore when being baptized. (Priests wear one every Sunday! The baptismal garment is called a stichar and it is the long robe that is underneath all of the vestments that goes to the floor on all sides.)

A candle to represent the Light of God being shown to the world for on Christ's Baptism we came to know the Holy Trinity for the Father's voice was heard and the Holy Spirit was seen in the form of a dove above Christ in the Jordan. This is like a light of Truth casting away our shadowy ideas of Who God is.

New holy water that you brought from Church in a vessel. This will be used to cleanse/bless our homes for God. Water symbolizes the Holy Spirit and a source of Life.

Three items! A white cloth, a candle, holy water.



Community Opportunity: Chili Cook Off!
Sunday March 7th 2027
Publican and the Pharisee Sunday (Fast-Free Week)

As we prepare for Great Lent we have a week of no fasting! Consider bringing a chili to share during coffee hour this day as we prepare to use up the meats in our homes, anticipating 48 days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

Community Opportunity:

GREAT LENT BEGINS
Sunday March 14th 2027
Forgiveness Vespers at 7:00 PM

Young and old are invited to help usher the church into Great Lent as we switch the gold vestment covers in the church to the contrite and Lenten Purple. We also ask each other forgiveness as is a tradition starting with the priest who says, "forgive me a sinner." And we respond "I forgive and God forgives, forgive me a sinner." And the priest responds, "I forgive and God forgives." And each person will do the same until everyone has asked the other person for forgiveness. The Resurrectional Canon from Holy Saturday is sung solemnly during this tradition of forgiveness as the lights also have been shut to emphasize the spirit of repentance that saturates the Great Lent journey. Candle light and the asking of forgiveness fills the church. It is one of the most important services of the year following the Great Feasts.

Community Opportunity:
Palm Cross Folding and Decorating Church Green:

Lazarus Saturday April 25th 2025
- Divine Liturgy 9:00 AM
Following the Divine Liturgy we will have a Lite Lenten Breakfast (Please consider bringing fruit or a dish to pass) We will fold palm crosses as well as switch over all of the vestment covers upstairs to Green! We will need help decorating with the large green Palms making a palm arch in the middle of the church. Please see Fr. Jonathan to learn more.

GREAT AND HOLY WEEK 2027

Community Opportunity: Decorating the Tomb of Christ
Holy Friday Morning
April 30th 8:00 AM (Parish Youth)

Notably young children (and all parish members) are invited to decorate the tomb of Christ with flowers during the quiet and solemn service of Royal Hours for Holy Friday. The Cross of Christ is in the center of the church. Fasting foods will be available in the church basement throughout the day for children and adults to have nourishment as there are three Services today.

Community Opportunity:
Holy Friday Afternoon April 30th, 3:00 PM (Parish Youth)

Taking Christ down from the Cross - Outdoor Burial Procession with Burial Shroud:
This is the burial service of Christ. All children are invited to help Fr. Jonathan take Christ down from the cross and wrap His icon in a white cloth. Near the end of the service everyone is invited to join the solemn procession of the burial shroud outside the church 3 times before reentering the Church walking beneath the burial shroud that is elevated and then is processed into the church and placed in the decorated tomb. Following the service, traditionally this would be the time for children to crawl beneath the tomb 3 times representing their own participation in Christ's death and resurrection.

Community Opportunity:
Holy Friday Evening April 30th 6:00PM

Lamentations / Matins Service with Procession of the Tomb around the outside of the Church:
This service has the beautiful and unique Lamentations hymns sung and a procession of the tomb of Christ outside the Church that represents His Light and Life moving through Hades and bringing Light and Life to those who sat in darkness. The flowers on the tomb are removed by the priest and every parishioner young and old reverently receives flowers that are then taken home and kept for the year in their prayer corners. Consider bringing a small bag to take your flowers home to dry.

Community Opportunity:
Great and Holy Saturday
Saturday April 30th 8:00 AM (Parish Youth)
Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil with 3 Old Testament Readings. This is the service where we celebrate the first hearing of the news of Christ's resurrection and we celebrate the new life brought to those in Hades in a Liturgical setting. Children will have the opportunity to ring bells and help remove the black vestment cloths to reveal the white Paschal covers. Bay leaves are tossed throughout the church as a great sign of victory!!!

More Paschal Community Opportunities to come with fellowship and preparing the Church for these Great Feasts!

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SAVE THE DATE!
FORGIVENESS SUNDAY IS MARCH 14th
With Forgiveness Vespers at 7:00 PM

Forgiveness Vespers sets the tone of Great Lent as the church begins the season of repentance / reconciliation on Sunday Evening. Because Vespers ushers in the new day, Great Lent actually begins at Vespers. We see the colors of the church move from the "bright festive and triumphant" color of Gold to the "dark" royal color of purple. The very pulse of the Church changes to one of contrition, the inner heart of the Publican, the journey of the Prodigal and the contemplation of Adam and Eve after they were led out of paradise. This "expulsion" from Paradise is the theme of Forgiveness Sunday as we enter into a voluntary "wilderness of Lent" away from the comforts of rich foods and relaxing or lazing about. Instead we put in more effort for that which is most important in life: to know God and to be known by Him. It is not a season of sorrow and giving up chocolate. Throw those ideas away, they are simply not Orthodox. It is a season of "joyful sorrow",that is to say we are sorry for our sins and we know God is compassionate, forgives and goes all the way to Hades to look for us with Adam and Eve and desires to pull us from the grave of our making. Will we follow Him? Adam and Eve made two mistakes, the first they disobeyed God's commandment and then they blamed everyone but themselves for their choices. One of them even blamed God. So with Forgiveness Sunday we ask each other for forgiveness saying, "Forgive Me." and the person responds God forgives and I forgive, Forgive me! and then the response is God forgives and I forgive." This way we begin the journey to Great Lent in communion with each other and with God for we approach Heaven together, but Hell is persevered for those who desire nothing but themselves.

SERVICES OF GREAT LENT and WHAT TO EXPECT

SUNDAYS Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great	**The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is offered every Sunday of Great Lent. It is a more ancient form of the Liturgy than our common Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. There are lengthier prayers and hymns that call to mind Christ, His life and life-saving work of mercy in death, burial and Resurrection.**
(Monday Evenings) **GREAT COMPLINE** (Prayers offered before icons of Christ and Theotokos with candles)	**A Bed-time or after supper prayer service. It is a private office with 2 versions, Great Compline and Small Compline. 9 Psalms are read (quickly), the Creed, evening prayers and during Lent the Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian and for those on a prayer list offered by those who attend. This service is very beautiful and unique compared to Liturgies.**
WEDNESDAYS & FRIDAYS **PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY** (Minimum 3 Hour Fast before service to receive Holy Communion, for those able fasting from Noon is prescribed)	**Because the Eucharist is our greatest strength in life the Church gives us Communion more often during Lent so we can succeed in the journey. As Sunday's Divine Liturgy celebration is such noted for its joyful tone, the celebration of the Eucharist it is reserved for Sundays and a more penitent style of Lenten service is offered during the week with melodies offered in the minor key.**
(SOUL SATURDAYS) Soul Saturday Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom with Memorial Service. Bring a list of names to be remembered if Fr. Jonathan does not yet have one. Memorial Wheat is offered.	**The dead cannot pray for themselves any longer, so it is a ministry to pray for them. It is also selfless and loving to think of those who have passed on and to care for them. On most Saturdays of Great Lent there is a Liturgy with memorial service offered for the dead. The traditional boiled wheat: Kutia/Koliva is offered during the memorial and the names of all reposed family members of the parish are read. Are you going to make time to pray for the dead this Lent? Who will pray for you when you die? Come & See!**
Canon of St. Andrew of Crete (M, Tu, W, Th of 1st Week of Lent and Thursday of the 5th Week of Lent)	**The Canon is very poetic and filled with references to people and symbols taken from the Old and New Testaments. The Canon speaks of some individuals in a positive light and others in a negative reminding us to keep the faith and avoid the negative examples of sin. The service attempts to portray Biblical images in a very personal way. These services are noted for the many prostrations you are invited to offer as able.**





FORGIVENESS VESPERS 7PM

Next Sunday the church sets the tone and direction we are headed with the beginning of Great Lent at Forgiveness Vespers. We recognize that we have fallen in sin in either word, deed or thought like Adam and Eve and we ask for forgiveness from each other saying, “God forgives!” in response. We begin the fasting season with this cleansing approach to prayer and fasting awaiting the Bridegroom Jesus Christ Who we walk with on the journey Pascha. If you have not attended, please join us and experience this beautiful rite of forgiveness.

WHY BRING KIDS TO FORGIVENESS VESPERS?

Forgiveness Vespers reminds us of the importance of asking God and each other for forgiveness. At the end of the service, we ask each other for forgiveness, and extend forgiveness to each other. Prepare your children for this service. Talk with them about what words your parish uses during this time of mutual repentance. Also discuss what those words mean. Model what will happen, so that those who have never attended a Forgiveness Vespers will know what to expect. Remind them of when the special service will take place, and encourage them to come to it and participate with you. Asking your children for forgiveness and extending forgiveness to them is a sweet and beautiful moment in year of the Church for everyone. Do what you can to help that moment to be able to happen!

Let us begin the fast with joy!
Let us prepare ourselves for spiritual efforts!

Let us cleanse our soul and cleanse our flesh!
Let us abstain from every passion as we abstain from food!
Let us rejoice in virtues of the Spirit and fulfill them in love,
that we all may see the Passion of Christ our God,
and rejoice in spirit at the holy Pascha!

(Above: Edited from OrthodoxChurchSchoolTeachers.WordPress.com

THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR

With its cycle of fasting and feasting, the Liturgical Calendar serves as a rubric for Orthodox Christian life. Each day is marked by specific scripture readings, commemorations of saints, and prayers; each week by a cycle of symbolic commemorations and fasting; and each year by a journey through the life of Christ, His mother, and the saints.

Here is an overview of some major feasts and saint days in the Orthodox Church calendar, beginning with the celebration of the New Year on September 1 (of course there are many other saint days and commemorations that occur each month as well):

+ September (New Calendar)

September 1 - Ecclesiastical New Year, Indiction - beginning of the liturgical calendar

September 8 - Nativity of the Theotokos - birth of the Virgin Mary

September 14 - Exaltation of the Holy Cross

September 21 - Nativity of St. John the Baptist

+ October

October 1 - Protection of the Mother of God

+ November

November 8 - Synaxis of the Archangel Michael and the other Bodiless Powers

November 15 - Beginning of the Nativity Fast

November 21 - The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple

+ December

December 6 - St. Nicholas the Wonderworker

December 25 - Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

+ January

January 1 - Circumcision of the Lord, St. Basil the Great

January 6 - Theophany of Our Lord

+ February

February 2 - Meeting of Christ in the Temple

February 15 - Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

+ March

March 25 - Annunciation to the Mother of God

+ April

Palm Sunday (Sunday before Pascha) - Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem

Pascha - Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ (sometimes as late as May)

Bright Week - week following Pascha

+ May

May 21 - Sts. Constantine and Helen

+ June

June 24 - Nativity of St. John the Baptist

+ July

July 20 - Prophet Elias (Elijah)

+ August

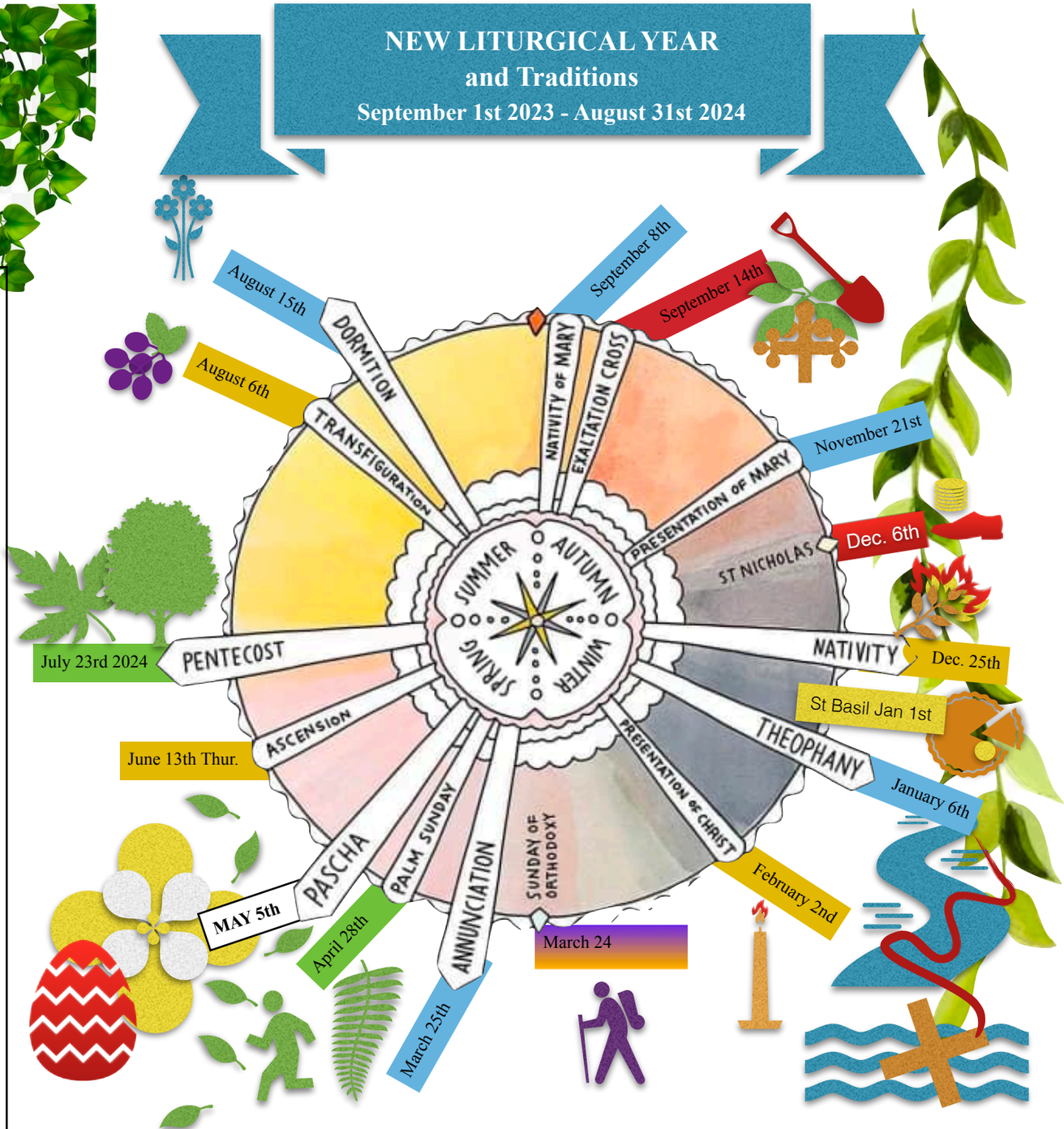
August 6 - Transfiguration of Our Lord

August 15 - Dormition of the Mother of God

August 29 - Beheading of St. John the Baptist

(Text above by Steve Linder

Illustration of calendar by Abigail Holt with clip art added by Fr. Jonathan Bannon.



A LIVING COMMUNITY
Hearing From Our Parish

A LIVING COMMUNITY:
Hearing from our Parish



My First Parish Visits

By Sonya N.

I was “working my way back to Orthodoxy”, and somehow ended up at Christ the Savior Orthodox Church. It is a long “God story” and I definitely do not think it was by chance.

As I was trying to find an Orthodox church to attend, I came across and read Pani Marianna’s article on the website about what to expect on a first visit to the church, which was very helpful. I have visited many Orthodox churches over the years, but only rarely services predominantly in English. And, I had never attended a Matins service before.

The moment I walked in, I felt “at home”. I was somewhat disoriented as to some things, but immediately recognized the table of candles to honor the deceased. Looking around the church, I recognized the “Russian flavor”, and smiled at what seemed to me to be the characteristic Russian “chaos” of people coming and going, talking, and children frolicking.

I was welcomed with open arms, and greeted by several members who helped me get oriented. I had regularly attended a series of Protestant churches over the past 30 years, due to geography. I looked forward to attending an Orthodox Church regularly and really learning all about Orthodoxy. I discovered that the church was founded by Belorussian immigrants and has Carpatho-Rusyn roots as a diocese, coincidentally (?) both my heritages. While the singing was in English, I found the familiar Russian versions passing through my mind.

I listened very carefully (probably for the first time in my life) to the words in the songs, chants, readings, and sermon. What I heard were praise and worship, petitions, intercessory prayers, spiritual warfare prayers, and scriptures directly from the Bible. I was surprised to hear some “extra details” about characters and events in the Bible that are not recorded in the Bible.

I am thankful that Father Jonathan has agreed to mentor me in my journey not only “back to” but ”deep into” Orthodoxy. I appreciate the kindness of all of the members, and look forward to getting to know all of you better.

A LIVING COMMUNITY:
Hearing from our Parish

The Jesus Prayer
&
The Fullness of Orthodoxy



By Anthony A.

The Jesus Prayer

As a newcomer to the Orthodox faith listening to a short podcast about the Jesus prayer that Fr Jon had sent to me, I noticed a couple things about the prayer that I hadn’t previously known. In the past, I had only been using the prayer when I felt temptations, I couldn’t sleep, or I was doing menial tasks like driving or mowing the lawn, but this isn’t the only use of the prayer. Met. Kallistos Ware mentions in the podcast a “fixed” use of the prayer, where we sit and say the prayer over and over for maybe 10 or 15 minutes alongside morning prayers. I have since found this to be useful in preparing myself for the day. The other major thing that stood out to me was when the Met. broke the Jesus prayer down, analyzing the deep theology behind the simple prayer. I hadn’t truly realized, previously, just how deep it goes in terms of both meaning and how the prayer has been used for things as simple as not being able to sleep as well as such profoundly deep spiritual places that our saints have reached.

The Fullness of Orthodoxy

When I was coming back to Christianity from a young adulthood full of atheism and nihilism, I naturally started to explore Protestantism first given that my parents are Protestant and it’s almost the de-facto Christianity in America. One of the major things that pushed me away from Protestantism, though, was the seemingly casual nature of it all. You go to church on Sunday and that’s about all there is to it. As I found and started exploring Orthodoxy, I found out that this didn’t have to be the way. Orthodoxy isn’t just going to Divine Liturgy for a couple hours and then you’re done for the week. It’s a day to day and hour by hour way of life. After Sunday it’s an immediate return to preparing for communion the next Sunday, having multiple fixed times for prayer each day and repeating the Jesus prayer as often as we reasonably can.
The Fullness of Orthodoxy

A LIVING COMMUNITY

"In His Kindness"

by Sara Erber



When I first became Orthodox, I had to undergo a lot of mental undoing. While often I ran into areas where it felt like Protestantism simply stopped short and didn't finish the story, there were also areas where, mostly due to Reformational influence, a "new understanding" was put on many of the timeless truths the Church had held for centuries. One of these that I still have to undo in my head, like a mental math equation, slowly bringing each number into the correct column, calculating the answer with deliberation, is our present state and relationship with God. We were born in exile. We are displaced. We're wandering in a strange land. We are outside of the Garden. Outside of Paradise. And this isn't how it's supposed to be.

No wonder we feel frustrated in our daily lives. No wonder we are at contention with our fellow man. No wonder we long for peace and harmony, yet consistently choose ourselves, despite that longing. No wonder we struggle. This isn't how it's supposed to be.

It is this understanding that has changed the way I look at life and our time here, outside the Garden. In the Garden, our first parents were in perfect submission. They walked with God. They talked with Him. Everything around them was at peace. It was the epitome of a perfect union, until that union was broken by Adam and Eve, choosing to go their own way.

But God, *in His kindness*….This was another phrase that I feel I did not understand the fullness of before my journey to Orthodoxy.

God, *in His kindness….* does not leave us outside the Garden with no hope or way back in. He provides a means through theosis. Synergy. The transformational process of becoming one with Him again. *And in His kindness*, He left us with a Mother, the Church, to lead us in this process of working our way back. Gently, she offers to teach and carry us through prayer, fasting, confession. Through a priest who is here and ready and anxious to serve us. And each Sunday, we are given a gift. A sneak peak, if you will, of the Paradise that was lost but will one day be our reality. Each week, I feel like, NOW, I understand, with the Psalmist. "O taste and see that Lord is good". When the Chalice is lifted up, when "With faith and love draw near" falls on our ears, I realize now what an incredible gift is offered in the Eucharist. For a brief moment, we are given a respite in this world in where we do not belong, and all is right. This is what heaven will be like. This, is what we were made for.

I was saved, I am being saved and I will be saved. It is a process. It is a journey. It is not one we are made for but one we are equipped for. And It is i*n His kindness,* that He leads us.

A LIVING COMMUNITY

"Going Into Lent"

by Jeremy Erber



[in 2018] as a catechumen preparing for my first Lent, I remember trying to figure out what all the services were for, what they meant, the nuance behind everything etc... While the Church is very intentional about what it gives us when, we do not need to understand all of it in order to begin benefiting from it. I found that simply going and experiencing what services I could, was the most important thing for me. It was less important to try and follow what comes next than to just be and absorb what was happening. I'm sure I will continue to learn more and get more out of Lent every year but as with any relationship, our relationship with God is built through time spent together, not simply understanding about Him.

"The Church as Hospital"

By Nino Munji RN



A church is like a hospital, in which both institutions distribute tools necessary for healing wounds. However, while a hospital mainly treats physical illness, we unite in church to achieve spiritual refuge.

As I stand with my church family, singing and worshipping Jesus, I suddenly become so small and I am humbled. Holding the gazes of the icon Saints and feeling the warmth of the Holy Spirit overflowing the room, the noises of the outside world become faint. As my voice gradually gets louder, crying out with songs of praise, my daily problems instantly become so minuscule, and I finally feel complete with prayer. I am light at my feet, almost as if I could fly. I am at peace. I am loved. And most importantly I am God's child and surrounded by a community of His children, each on our own journey of faith, towards the same goal: the Heavenly Kingdom.

FOUNDING MEMBERS







Rus' Photos:

A Bunker turned into an Orthodox Church:
While staying at camps for displaced persons a bunker was converted into a church for the Orthodox to worship in.

Standing in Prayer

Standing is the most ancient form of the worship of God. It shows the resurrection as when we kneel it shows a fallen or brokeness which is why we do not often if ever kneel on the day of the Lord's resurrection (Sunday) and during the Paschatide season (50 days that follow Pascha.) Studies claim when we sit our attention is less focused as well. Speaking of attention: In Europe. Men often sat on the Right side (Icon of Christ) and Women on the left (Icon of Mary) In the early years of our parish this European tradition was still practiced as it showed a deliberate focus and intent of our time in the Church: the worship of God alone with all of our attention on Him.

As an Altar Boy

With the triple candle for Pascha we see the Orthodox priest serving and Rus as an altar boy in the camp also serving. Thanks be to God.

Honoring a founding member: "Russ" Rusolaw Nafranowicz:

A reflection by Fr. Jonathan





Top: Rus speaking with our church on a Wednesday night 5 years ago. We were honored to hear several founding members on different evenings speak about their lives, triumphs upon a road of hardship that lead from Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, to Rockford, IL. Their Faith was a great light, the only true light in the face of WWII's travesties.

Bottom: Rus to the far right: Serving a midnight Liturgy for Easter (Pascha) in a displaced persons / Refugee camp in Germany.

12 years ago Pani Marianna and I drove up to Christ the Saviour to help with a Sunday morning service after Fr. Basil Aden retired. I had never been to Rockford or this far West in my life. Pulling into the parking lot there was a blue minivan that also arrived with the Nafranowciz couple smiling and ready to welcome us and unlock the Church. Maria introduced herself and Rus did also while he went to unlock the front door while carrying some food for coffee hour. Rus would not for the life of him let me help carry any food. He and his wife were simply focused on serving others. This was my first experience of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church and the dear Nafranocwiz team we know as Rus and Maria. At this time I was a Sub-deacon and so we offered an appropriate prayer service and concluded with coffee hour where I had the chance to get to know Rus a little more and he shared with me that he was born in Belarus and upon my questioning he shared the how hard WWII was.

Over the years I would have many more opportunities to hear about Rus' life and experience his gentle kindness and desire to serve. These stories that he would share with me are too dear to keep to myself and they deserve to be heard by our community and beyond the walls of our church. So we are thankful to Rus for sharing hard stories of persecution and imprisonment by the German armies and bright stories of being liberated by the United States Armed Forces and traveling to America to start a new life. I would like to share some of the stories Rus offered us on a Wednesday night in this article and to invite those who were not able to hear them to read on and also ask those who know Rus to share their stories as well with you.

Rus began with life on a farm in Belarus without water and without electricity. He grew up in a small village with about 40 families and half of them were Nafranocwiz's and the other half of another family. He remembers riding a horse and was about 6 years old when life suddenly changed as German soldiers told everyone to congregate in the center of town or else the next group of soldiers would kill everyone. His family made a big wooden box and filled it with their most precious clothing and items and buried it believing they would return for they were already used to living in a country often occupied by others. Rus remembers seeing his farm get shot with flaming bullets and the sky filled with smoke as the soldiers brought what is called "scorched earth" through their path. He and others were put on cattle cars and brought to a labor camp where his parents would work 12 hour shifts in the day one week and 12 hour shifts at night another week and at times Rus would help sort rubber as the labor camp was making tires for the Germans. Sometimes a kind German would dump apples near a barbed wire fence so these captured people would have something better to eat.

After 4 years Rus heard the whistling of bombs falling from the sky began to increase and he knew the Germans were being driven out. Sometimes a plane would fly close to their labor camp and drop a bomb but it never hit them. Soon the Germans soldiers abandoned the Camp and the U.S soldiers arrived giving candies to him and others in the camp. It was here Rus learned about the diversity of people with various shades of skin as his life in Belarus was very secluded, respectfully. From here Rus and his family were brought to at least 6 more camps for at least 4 more years. Now in stead of sleeping in triple bunk beds they were staying in the beds and quarters the German soldiers used to sleep in. The Unites States was only accepting professionals so Rus and his family as farmers could not come to America so they prepared to head to Australia because there was nothing to go back to in Belarus. Suddenly, America needed farmers and quickly he and many others from his village ran back to the office and filled out the paper work to come to America where they spent 2 weeks on a boat. In a great storm on the ocean everyone went inside except for Rus who got locked out and was banging on the door for someone to let him in for he was only person on the deck. Arriving in America, Rus and others lived in former slave shacks* a plantation in Arkansas where he helped pick cotton for a year making 3 dollars a day as they had to pay off their travel. With work booming in Rockford they traveled North and settled here. *(raised wooden, uninsulated, wooden slave sheds)

Rus remembers people crying and being overjoyed when the US Soldiers arrived at their camp having lived behind barbed wire fences for 4 years. He remembers people praising God for their liberation from the Nazi army as the US soliders arrived. The first thing that the families from Belarus built after getting out from yoke of the Nazi Germany and the yoke of picking cotton was an Orthodox Church to give thanks to God.

Rus was recently asked to be a God-parent again. He shared he was surprised that he was asked and I told Rus that being asked really shows his character, he is meek and gentle and very selfless in his giving to his Church. The man is an example of humility and not wearing Christianity "as a style." I've found Rus many times either patching the concrete outside, repainting the Church sign out on the grass, to having our former basement carpet cleaned and believe me that is just the tip of all Rus has done in 60 years of freedom here in Rockford. So it is no surprise that Rus has been asked to be a God-parent. Because of Rus' Faith it is also no surprise that he is not filled with great bitterness toward God and toward humanity after all he saw and heard in the war as a child. His life has been very much the opposite, he with his dear wife Maria have lived **a story of faith and trust in God no matter the season.** We are greatly honored to have Rus and Maria and it was a particular joy to say thank you to Rus on Wednesday night a few years ago for **building our church,** and again in the hospital when visiting him last week.

Axios! Many Years! God grant Rus a full recovery and good health! And strength to his dear beloved wife, Maria, his brother Victor, and sisterinlaw Sophie!

Tools for Relationships

PREPARE ENRICH®

• building strong marriages •

CARING FOR OUR MARRIAGES IN 2027

Fr. Jonathan is a certified facilitator for the Prepare Enrich program. This is a large aspect of the wedding prep he uses to prepare people who are planning to be married in our parish. It is the same program that Pani Marianna and Fr. Jonathan went through with a Greek Orthodox priest in the Chicagoland area when they were getting ready to be married. Enough Orthodox priests use this program that P/E added Orthodox questions in the assessment.

What is Prepare Enrich? It is a compreresenive program where the couple take answer questions in an assessment that lends itself to talking points and offering tested and tried resources that aid in relationship building, conflict resolution, communication skills and all the things we often don't have classes on in life.

As a priest it is important we prepare people for life and not just a wedding day. I cannot emphasize enough how helpful it was to go through the program and to be able to offer it to our Church.

WHO TAKES THE ASSESSMENT?

Those preparing to be married. **AND** those who are already married and would like to take a smaller version of it to explore ways of building on their marriage and growing closer together and sharping relationship skills.

Does it cost anything? 30 dollars goes to Prepare/Enrich to take the assessment. Fr. Jonathan is offering to facilitate the meeting(s) and share what he knows from the training for members of our church interested in exploring this resource.

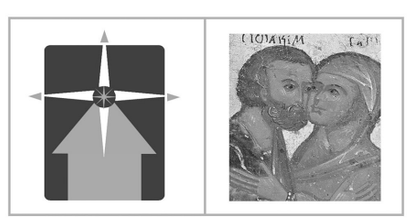
Information as found on their website: **Transforming Relationships**

More than 4,000,000 couples have prepared for marriage or enriched their relationship through taking the P/E assessment and working with a Certified Facilitator. The assessment itself has been proven to improve relationship satisfaction; however there is something extraordinary about the relationship a Facilitator develops with a couple that truly helps the couple grow more than they would on their own.

Evidence-Based

P/E is one of the most widely researched assessment tools. Professors and students at colleges and universities worldwide use the scales as a tool to conduct and evaluate their research. P/E continues to adapt and react to the changing reality of relationships through continued research and development of assessments and resources.

In 2020 Fr. Jonathan traveled to Texas for professional development in learning how to best serve the needs of married couples and relationship growth that a priest finds in the parish setting.



Info on Texas Retreat: Sponsored by the Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in collaboration with the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Houston, Texas. A generous grant from Leadership 100 is helping to fund this conference. We are grateful for their support. Utilizing the expertise of leaders in the field of pastoral care and marriage, the purpose of this conference is to offer people in ministry inspiration, tools and resources for dealing with the pastoral challenges in marriage they encounter as they serve Christ and His Church. In addition to our keynote presentations and workshops, the conference will offer participants opportunities for formal and informal discussion. It is our hope that participants will leave the conference with a network of people to support them in their ministry.

BLESSING
BEG

Being Honorable

Being an Orthodox Christian

The Orthodox Church is not just another organization, club or fraternal society. It is the Body of Christ, and a life-giving relationship with God. The Orthodox Church is the continuation of the Christian Church from the time of Christ until the present. As Orthodox Christians, we do not have a relationship with Christ in isolation, but alongside other Orthodox Christians. With these things in mind, Orthodox Christians are expected to:

- Strive daily to live a Christian life, according to the teachings of Our Lord in the Gospels, and the tradition of the Church.
- Regularly participate in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays (and on holydays as permitted by your employment).*
- Regularly receive Holy Communion and participate in the Sacrament of Holy Confession. (The minimum is no less than once a year.)
- Strive to fight against the passions of the flesh by honoring the body, mind, and spirit. We harm ourselves when chasing after sin. In relationships, we practice abstinence until marriage.
- **For the Men of our Parish:** Strive to be a Levendis. An ancient and cultural pre-Christian Greek word: Λεβέντης, pronounced: Luh-ven-TH'EIS) is a man of honor. It is not honorable to objectify women. It is not honorable nor Orthodox to treat a wife as subservient. Husbands and wives are two halves of a whole unit in marriage and with love and respect, sacrifice for the other. The husband is likened unto Christ who gave Himself for the life of the Church. The wife is likened unto the Church who founded upon the blood of martyrs gave herself for the Life of Christ. This is what the two crowns represent in the Orthodox Marriage service. They are crowns of martyrdom in a spirit of freedom, self-offering, and love. In regards to a husband being the head it is understood the example is like Christ who is the first to sacrifice Himself. Also like all wise and successful leaders, they surround themselves with good counsel and in counsel and communication with one's wife is wise, expected, encouraged, and loving.
- **For the Men in our Parish:** Women are to be honored and protected. There is no honor in self-seeking fallen desires. Make the sign of the cross. Remind yourself whose image and likeness we carry and whose image and likeness women carry. Christ tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Nothing will cause more discord in the heart and mind than throwing aside prayer and leaving the doors of our heart and mind unguarded. Fallen desires are hurled by the devil like arrows that fly by day and he invites our mind to be like the pestilence that creeps along the ground at night. We are above such things. So let this be a goal for all men in our parish: **honor before all else.** When we are with women we are before holy icons and we should respond to that truth with our lives. Cultivate a pure heart and life of Philotimo (Greek for: love of honor) Truly, nothing good comes from sin.
- **STEWARDSHIP:** Offer your whole life to Christ, and offer the "Three T's"—time, talent and treasure—to sustain the church. Participate in parish ministries and activities. Volunteer to help. Give monetary support. Our parish does not survive on stewardship, we 'thrive" on this form of voluntary giving of who we are. If we are unable to donate monetarily there are many other ways to give with time and talents. If you have any questions about Stewardship please as our Stewardship Officer and Board Vice President Curtis Barnes or the parish priest.

**Those who are homebound and/or physically unable to attend services on a regular basis are asked to spiritually join in prayer on Sundays and holydays. The priest will visit with the Sacraments periodically throughout the year, as requested.*



Caring for the Whole Person.

We are biopsychosocial people.
Not just flesh, not just emotions, not just a spirit, not just a mind.
We were made of body and spirit, and God assumed flesh and made it His dwelling place.
So our truest identity is a living temple of God. To be fully human is to be active in that pursuit of His Presence.

Let's unpack that.

To be a temple of God means there is sacrifice* worship, prayer, light, forgiveness, ritual cleansing, fasting and the feasts. These are relational things. God is relationship because God is Person in community, Unity in Diversity, One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So we are not individuals or islands but persons in relation to God and each other.

Let's continue to explore our identity in this Orthodox lens.

God made us from the dust of the earth and breathed his living eternal breath into us.

Why is that important?

Dust is a humble origin and helpful to consider so we don't become prideful. But it teaches us more. Dust oscillates between the ground and the air, it does not just stay on the ground like dirt. This is an intentional description from Genesis to teach us that the human person is not of the world like dirt but of Heaven as well. Remember dust moves between the two spaces. So the human person was made to be God's presence in His creation. So while it is humble to remember we are of dust, we are not only dust but we carry His eternal breath that brought us to life.

When we consider needs of a human person we do not only approach with prayer but consider all aspects and should strive to care in a balanced way our emotions, our physical bodies, our spiritual life.

**(sacrifice is actually what makes a temple different from a synagogue, it is not worship or prayer but sacrifice.)*

ORTHODOX PROFESSIONALS:

We are blessed to know professionals who are loving and have an Orthodox understanding of the heart and mind near Chicago. Please consider Dr. Arey Christofidis, and or Dr. Randa Anderson. The Orthodox Christian Counseling Institute (OCCI) is a professional network of Orthodox psychologists, counselors, and marriage and family therapists. It was founded in 2004 by Dr. Ary Christofidis as a referral resource in the Chicago metropolitan area, including Northwest Indiana. Dr. Sofie Azmy is an Orthodox psychologist and wife of a Coptic Orthodox priest. She was our keynote speaker for the Lenten Mission in 2023. Her website is: https://lightchoicepsych.com/

SPEAKING WITH YOUR PRIEST:

Please know you can call me anytime if there is something troubling you. It is not a sign of weakness to share something that may be heavy on your heart or mind. As a priest and Father to our parish, I want you to feel invited to have confidence in calling if you need someone to listen or to pray for you. (My cell: 815-721-4952)

Every heart has a cross and you do not need to carry it alone. - Fr. Jonathan

ONLINE RESOURCES FROM DIOCESE:

Rockford's New Parish Website:

www.CTSRockford.org

Diocesan Website:

www.acrod.org

Camp Nazareth:

www.campnazareth.org

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/acroddiocese

Twitter:
https://twitter.com/acrodnews

You Tube:
https://youtube.com/acroddiocese

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Parish Prayer List

PARISH PRAYER LIST:

Share names with Fr. Jonathan if you have someone you would like to be prayed for and/or to have a name removed.

Recently Illumined-
Michael H.
Elaine
Brandon, Haley, and their son.
Conlan

Catechumens/Inquirers:
Julie
Michael & his wife + 1 child
Zach and Emily S. + 3 children
Jason and Kjersti E. + 5 children
Joseph
Cecilia
Abraham
Jake
Zack
Sheridan
Alexis
Jason
Sam

Our Patriarch: His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and those serving in the Patriarchate in Turkey (persecuted by government),

Our Metropolitan: His Eminence Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa and all those working in Johnstown and throughout our Diocese, our Spiritual Fathers and All Patriarchs and Bishops.

All College Students, OCF members and recent graduates.

Christ the Saviour Seminary : ACROD
The seminarians named are:

- Fr. Peter Sodini (Niles Parish)
- Fr. Maximus Cannaverde
- Deacon Bradley Shaffer
- Nicholas Cizin
- John Fedornock III
- Spyridon Raburn
- Clay Wood
- Gabriel Saldana
- David Miazga
- Ignatius Dixon

Recent graduate who joined the Seminary staff:

- Ignatius Leonardo

Safety of Local Law Enforcement and Firefighters and Emergency Care:
Loredona S.. Matthew Z Sarah Z.

For recovering mothers from having babies: Valeria

For the Health and Peace of:
Eric (Amber's Cousin) Leslie and Teron (Naomi's Parents), Halina Wojtowicz, Michelle (Gavin's Mother), Veronica, Steven, Zoey, Emily, Joshua, Molly, Paul, Jill and Craig (Sister and nephew of Jessie M.), ChristyAnn and all parish members.

Clergy Families In the Diocese: for health and recovery.
Fr. Dan Malher, Pani Betty Jean Barnik, Pani Lina Barriger, Pani Dolores Zuder, Fr. Nicholas Wyborski, Pani Eleanor Pribish, Fr. Robert Prepelka, Fr. Edward Pehanich and Pani Kathy, Seminary Prefect, Father Michael Rustick, Fr. Luke Mihaly (Danbury, CT) Retired priests: Father Michael Miklos and Pani Karen (FL).

For the Souls of the Reposed:
Newly Departed Handmaiden of God Pani Sharon Holowaty, Newly Departed Christine (Uncle of Pam Barnes) Fr. Michael Miklos, Pani Joan Mahler, Fr. Thomas Blaschak, Theodoros "Ted" Panagiotopoulos (owner of 5 Coins Restaurant in Rockford and neighbors to our parish home) Pani Andrea Kovich

The Hierarchs His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos Ware + His Grace Bishop Athanasius Akunda of West Kenya and Kisumu, + His Eminence Archbishop Gavriel - Paris, France (friend of Fr. Jonathan) His Eminence Metropolitan Constantine and Father Gabriel (family Maurice and Manal) and the priests: The Very Reverend Protopresbyter Fr. John Duranko. Fr. Peter Benyo (August 2022), Rev. Deacon Janke and Nina, Very Rev. Protopresbyter Fr. Ronald Hazuda, Fr. William George, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Macura, Fr. Tony Joseph and Pani Patsy. Very Rev. Fr John Baranik, Very Rev. Proto. Michael Polanichka, Subdeacon Jim Janeck, Fr. George S Zervos, Weira, Olga Moore (Sister of Maria Nafranwicz and Sophie Brucki, Thomas (Son of Lidia and Walter Rakuc) Halena (Friend of Irena Larson) Stephen & Sophie Harbachuk, William (Pani Marianna's Great Uncle/Aunt - Spring Valley), Geraldine (Paula Grady's Sister) (Esther Pronschinske - Mya Groza's Grandmother) Trevor Larry Koss (Laura Warmke's Grandfather (Kevin - Sara Erber's Uncle), Mary Andrews, Professour Dimitrios Liakos (Former Art Director of NIU and Orthodox Iconologist who led many trips to Meteora for NIU students) Daniel, Helen, Sandy, Francis J. Schmuck (Craig Warmke's Grandfather) and Beatrice, Weira Hryszcuck, William (Bill) Johnson. (husband of Mary Johnson Friend of Parish) Edward (Paula Grady's cousin) Soija Ageev (Natasha Wagner's Grandma) Anna Evanisko (Pani Miloro's mother), Danny, Nicholas, Maria. Lawrence, Valerie, Scott, Mary, Pearlene, Gary, Anne and, Glen, Raymond Bannon (Fr. Jonathan's Godfather) Luba Bremer, Lamonte Shonagel, Lidia Parfiaevich, Thomas Rakuc, Farid (Mana's Father), Youssef and Rasmeyah (Maurice's Parents) Thomas (Orthodox friend of Caroline) Steven and Sally (Parents of Steve R.) Debbie (Sister of Nicole Meier. Robin (Cousin of Nicole Meier and friend Teresa) Bill and Jade (Parents of Ishmael C.) Pomeroy and Marsha (Parents of Will Robinson), Don (Father of Danny H.), Ralph (Grandfather of Laura W.) Thomas, Christian, Austin (Friends of Caroline) Jairam (Brother of Christine) Theresa and Peter Tatsis (Father of His Eminence Metropolitan Gregory)

Anniversary of repose:
Please inform Fr. Jonathan if you have anniversaries and people to commemorate with prayer. Thank you.

Monastics: Hieromonk Athanasios, Abbess Christonimfi and her retinue of St. Stephen's Orthodox Monastery -Meteora Greece (They donated all of the 24" x 36" icons for our narthex and nave asking only to be prayed for as the "best donation" we could give them.

Nuns of Piatra Fantanel Monastery in Romania who made our vestments and sent many icons and prayer ropes as gifts to our children.

Nuns of St. Jacob the Mangled in Lebanon who made vestments for Fr. Jonathan and are currently making prayer ropes he purchased to give to those in need.

Intentions: The return of stolen Hagia Sophia to the Orthodox Church.

Sacraments



SACRAMENTS AND BLESSINGS

MINISTRY TO PERSONS WHO ARE SICK - We urge Orthodox Christians who would like to receive Holy Sacraments but are unable to attend Church (hospitalized or at home) to contact Fr. Jonathan so Holy Sacraments can be administered to them (8157214952)
If your loved one is hospitalized please call, even if the illness is not serious! In a holistic approach to healing and well-being, a visit from the priest can be very positive. Most hospitals do not inform us when they receive patients from our parish. We depend on you!

BLESSINGS OF INFANTS—Forty days after birth, a child and its mother come to church to receive a 40 Day Blessing, imitating Christ who was presented in the Temple 40 days after He was born. Please call the parish priest to arrange this blessing.
BAPTISMS—Please see Fr. Jonathan to schedule Baptisms. Plan ahead!—There are some days when Baptisms are not performed (During Great Lent and some fasting seasons). Keep in mind that the Godparent shall be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing.

WEDDINGS—Please arrange an appointment with Fr. Jonathan at least **eight months** before the proposed wedding date to allow time for all necessary marriage preparation (Prepare Enrich classes). Regular attendance to an Orthodox Church is a requirement of the diocese for those desiring to enter the sacrament of marriage and they must be in good standing both sacramentally and with Stewardship. Marriages are solemnized on Saturdays or Sundays. Circumstances may require a dispensation from the diocesan bishop. Consult the parish priest before any plans have been made for the wedding reception. Marriages cannot be celebrated during the fasting seasons of the church, or on Fridays.
CONFESSION—Confessions are often arranged by appointment. Please call to schedule Confession. During the Lenten season time for Confession is made available before and after selected services.

MEMORIAL SERVICES—Memorial Services are offered for the eternal rest of persons who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Customarily, these services are offered at 40 days, at 6 months, at 1 year and at 3 years. When three years have passed, the departed are more properly remembered on the Saturdays of the Souls offering the Kutya/Koliva/Boiled Wheat.

END OF LIFE ISSUES

1 - The Right to a Proper Funeral

It is an honor to have a church funeral. When the funeral does not take place at the church it indicates that someone is not in good order. Sometimes out of convenience, we consider omitting a church funeral for our loved ones, not realizing that we are depriving them of their right to be honored. Let us honor our parents and relatives with the respect they deserve! Eulogies offered by family or friends are most appropriately offered at the meal following the Funeral service. Church Funerals are, under ordinary circumstances, provided for practicing Orthodox Christians who are current in their spiritual and material obligations to the parish; otherwise, the funeral service is conducted at the funeral home. The Church does not permit cremation.

2 - About Cremation

Orthodox Christians believe that in the General Resurrection, our bodies and souls will be restored to each other. Cremation is the deliberate desecration and destruction of what God has made, an act of violence upon the body and is viewed as the denial of the Resurrection.

In cases where there is intention for the body of a deceased person to be cremated, thus choosing to disregard our understanding of the Resurrection, the honor of a church funeral is not given, either in the church, or the funeral home or any other place.

Additionally, memorial services are not allowed. There is nothing the church can offer when her traditions are disregarded with something so sacred as burying a loved one just as Christ was buried. The body is a sacred vessel and is required to be treated as such both in life and after death.

Stewardship

STEWARDSHIP INFO:

Three T's; Time, Talent, and Treasure.

Without a maximum or minimum amount, we are all encouraged to consider proportional giving. We find 10% is spoken of scripturally, 5%, 1%, whatever the amount, we can consider what God gives us and be intentional with how we give back which in turn helps our parish be forward thinking as we plan and work on projects.

Beyond finances we explore our talents and time. We have a choir, board positions, study groups, landscaping, the book store, library and spiritual resources, further we have ministries with prison, food banks and preparing for feast days with tombs and flowers. There is the Sunday Fellowship Meal and hospitality which is an extension of the Liturgy where we enjoy fellowship and share in a communion of agape. We also have simply being present, attending services and praying for each other, talking to a visitor and continuing to offer a warm and safe space we call the hospital of the Church.

PLEDGE CARD

A Pledge Card will be available and is required of everyone each year to be considered a member. (This required aspect was voted on a few years ago at an annual meeting.)

We ask everyone to please fill out a pledge for 2025 after praying and thinking of how to respond to God with your time, talent and treasure. In addition to filling out a financial pledge you will be able to check off ways you are already giving of your time and talents. This is intentional because our value as members of God's church is not based on how large our financial giving is. We want you to see on the tangible card that whatever the amount we give, we also have responded with our whole person in other ways.

So I ask you as your priest, please consider the good words offered by our Stewardship Officer Maurice AlMassad and Parish Board President Jeremy Erber who will speak about Stewardship at this November's Annual Meeting on Nov. 10th. Filling out a pledge card will help us as we continue to plan and explore how to best care for our growing parish.

Your servant, Fr. Jonathan

Membership Information

Sacramental and Membership Information:



Parishioners in “good standing” are those Orthodox Christians who, as members of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church, strive to live according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church; participate in the life of the parish through regular church attendance, regular reception of Holy Communion and periodic Holy Confession (and receive these sacraments no less than once a year); and financially support the parish (especially through an annual “submitted stewardship pledge card”). Prospective members and returning members are asked to fill out a Stewardship Card, copies of which are available near Church entrance. Only members in good standing sacramentally and with stewardship are allowed a voice & vote at annual parish meetings and to be considered for serving on the parish board or any other ministry offered in our parish proper.

- PARISH PRAYER RULE:

15 minutes daily: Set a timer and begin.
5 min- Scripture Reading (Consider the daily readings)

- **5 min- Prayer** (Consider the Psalms, the Prayer of the Optina Elders, or if you feel the strength to do so consider the Morning Prayer of Daybreak by St. Sophrony of Essex. Your perception of the day will be changed if you offer this prayer.

5 min.- Silence.





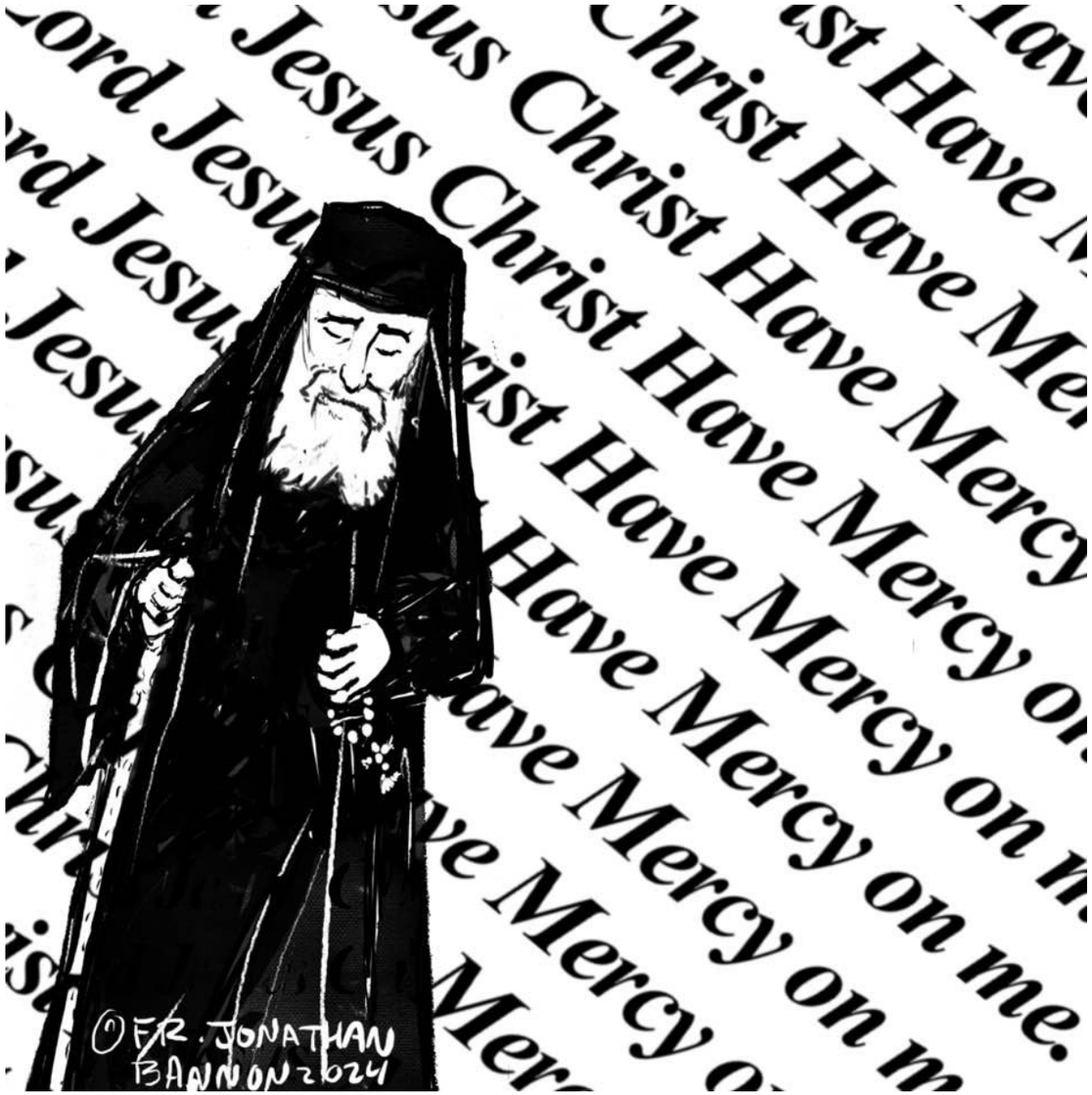
PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

(St. John Chrysostom) • Lord, forgive my sins and deliver me from eternal torment. Deliver me from unreasonableness, forgetfulness, cowardice, and stubbornness. Enlighten my heart which evil desires have darkened. Have mercy on me, knowing the sickness of my soul. Grant me tears of remorse and remembrance of my death. Grant me the thought of confessing my sins. Grant me humility, chastity, and obedience. Grant me patience, courage, and meekness. Plant in my heart the root of all blessings, the fear of Thee. Help me to love Thee with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. Lord of Heaven and Earth, remember me in Your Kingdom! For to Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do I look for mercy, In Thee do I trust for forgiveness. And from Thee do I receive healing of my soul and body. Amen.

Confession is an integral part of our path of restoration and spiritual formation. Father Jonathan will hear confessions by appointment and following Vespers on Wednesdays.

Illustrations and Articles

from previous bulletins offered here in the online edition.


Jesus Christ Have Mercy on me.
©FR. JONATHAN BANNON 2024


Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner.
©FR. JONATHAN STEPHEN BANNON 2024
The Night Watch
JSBANNON@gmail.com



Holy Things are for the Holy

And so then he (St. Paisios) said we shouldn't compare each other to one another; we need to compare ourselves to the saints or to Christ, because if we compare ourselves to each other, we'll either become proud if we think we're better off, or we'll be depressed if we think we're worse off. But we need to compare ourselves to Christ and the saints because then that's a good mirror for us. Because some people say, "I don't go to the *bouzoukia*; I go to vigils. I'm holy!" He says but we shouldn't be comparing ourselves to one another; we should be comparing ourselves with Christ and the saints. I like that a lot, too.

- Recollection from Fr. Nicholas Palis
- Bulletin Illustrations by Fr. Jonathan Bannon



FROM THE HOLY MOUNTAIN:

Callinicus the Hesychast was sought out by a monk whose soul was afflicted with intrusive thoughts and temptations beset him. He shared with Callinicus the situation and the holy Father told him to fill a bucket with water and throw some dirt in, give it a mix. Asking him if he could see anything in the water, the troubled monk responded, no it is clouded. So they continued to discuss and the meek Callinicus with love and care encouraged him. Callinicus told him to examine the water and the monk responded it has begun to clear up, so they continued for a bit more and Callinicus reminded him to look again at the bucket. It has become perfectly clear he responded, I can pick out some little pebbles from the bottom easily now. The kind Callinicus replied, "Something of the sort has happened to you, too. At the present, your mind is like the muddy water. Do not be upset, however. Have some patience, and in two or three months the trouble and muddiness , will settle, and you will see how much clearer and straighter you will think." " Things developed exactly as the hesychast had said.

- from the book Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos Vol.1



Why do we use incense?

Practical: The pleasant aroma of incense on a practical level helps calm the mind and remind us of the beauty of God. We pray for peace at the beginning of every service, *"In peace let us pray to the Lord, Lord have mercy. For the peace of the world for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord, Lord have mercy."* It is hard to engage in a dialogue when we are without peace. God is our peace. Peace is a person and that person is Jesus Christ. Peace much like Truth is a person, not a feeling. So on the most fundamental level incense simply can engage the olfactory system and bring us to a place of peace as we strive to be attentive to our God Who is "invisibly in our midst" as the priest prays at the altar in the quiet prayers only heard by God and those who may serve.

Theological:
Because of the fall of humanity in the garden we read we will now till the earth and by the sweat of the brow work the fields. When many people who have been working all day gathered together in Temple ages ago before modern hygiene, incense would mask the aroma of so many people. A monk who helped our parish with Divine Liturgies when Fr. Jonathan would be away at various events once shared in a sermon that the incense can then be a reminder of this fallenness. When the priest censes us it is because of the shared humanity that has fallen and we are striving to return to the pre-fallen state of life in Christ. This is also the other side of the coin where being censed in Church just as the icons and the altar are censed is because the image and likeness of God is in every one of us. Censing someone or something is part of the church preparing us and the space around us to be ready for the sacrifice and worship of the Liturgy. To cense something is to set it apart, to bless it, to acknowledge that it is blessable, to prepare it for God's work. So the symbolism has many sides. Even the censer itself has much symbolism which can be seen in the image above.

Historical: Incense is a burnt offering. it is an offering from the created world offered back to God to fill his house with a heavenly scent. Similar to making prosfora, wine, embroidered vestments, the articulation of sung hymns, all of this is a prepared offering. Incense is no different. The monks and nuns prepare the recipe prayerfully.
Scriptural significance: In the book of Daniel we read "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence." Here we see the 2nd Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ as one wrapped in the clouds. The clouds here are descriptive of the heavens. In spiritual geography with heaven above and the world below our feet the incense rising is a reminder of our prayers rising up to God. Further we read in the New Testament book of Revelation 5:8, "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" and again in Rev. 8:4, "An angel offers incense on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke and prayers rise to God." Our worship offered to God in the Church mirrors the revealed worship of the angels before God in heaven. As Orthodox Christians we never "make up" worship,. Instead we receive the tradition which came before us and the offering of incense is part of this spiritual inheritance.

Final Thought: As with many things in the Orthodox Church there are both practical and mystical symbols that are equally valid and important. Someone may say I don't need candles and incense to pray to God. While this is true, one can pray wherever they are we are not a Faith of minimalism and we strive to engage and offer our entire person to God with all 5 senses. Our Faith is more than a cerebral /mental exercise of doctrines we hold to be true. It is a way of life and the fallen world and demons want our attention on anything other than God. The incense can catch our heart and mind before we even see an icon like walking into a the home of a grandfather or grandmother who has dinner cooking. Before we even see the food the love of hospitality has already affected us. It is the same with incense. - Fr. Jonathan



Why do we light candles?

Historical practicality: They helped with illuminated the space of prayer and worship.

Sacrifice:
Candles are lit because we no longer offer living animal sacrifices as the Jews had done in the Temple. Now the bloodless sacrifice of Christ is offered in the Eucharist every Liturgy. Candles are still a burnt offering and often a donation is given for a candle so there is a sacrifice of one's alms.

Devotion:
Candles symbolize devotion to God and remembrance of the faithful who have passed away.

Spiritual significance:
Lighting a candle can evoke a sense of peace, and our embodied faith uses all of the senses in prayerful ways that help us become attentive to the inner life of prayer. The very action of picking up a candle and focusing on lighting it from another candle causes the person to be very present. It is in the present moment we encounter God. Psychotherapists speak of not ruminating on the past. Christ teaches not worrying about many things and the future. Engaging with an oil lamp or candle is both spiritually helpful and psychologically / emotionally healthy. The church has many practices that where this multi-layered care takes place. For example think of the ease that can come to the heart when smelling a pleasing aroma of incense in church. What is the first petition of the Liturgy? In "peace" let us pray to the Lord. In order to be present, in order to be still, in order to be prepared to encounter Christ we need peace. The traditions of the church help us succeed in this.

Symbol of the Unwaning Light:
The burning of candles reminds us of our call to walk in the light and not in the darkness of passions and sin.

ICONOGRAPHY AND REFLECTED LIGHT:
We have an older member of the church who converted to Orthodoxy from Lutheranism. He married Halina's sister Virginia and was a dairy farmer from Wisconsin. His name was Lamonte and Fr. Jonathan visited him at Bildhal Street not far from the church for ten years before he fell asleep in the Lord. Lamonte would recall growing up on a farm as a child and the only light he hand in his house at night was the light of the moon, and the light of kerosene lamps. We often experience life with the dead light of electricity that evenly distributes light but much of the churches aesthetic traditions relied on flickering candles and oil lamps and in some cases like monasteries many services were offered before the sun would rise. Think of being in a church where the icons have either a gold leafed reflective background or are covered with those gold or silver covers called Riza's that only show the painted face and hands of the saint. These gold leafed backgrounds, and precious metal embossed covers, oil lamps, carved iconostasis', perforated icon stands, all of these would have a relationship with the light of candles and the of day or night. The Church would look different and active when the sun rises as the Matin's psalms are chanted. The icons would look alive when the chandelier would swing back and forth above the center nave of the church. The community of the saints depicted in the icons would feel very present as the incense caught our mind, the icons caught our vision, the wine and bread of the Eucharist caught our deepest thirst, the kiss of the cross sealed our lips, the sign of the cross and bow of our head caught our very body, and the chanting caught our ears and heart. Over and over the church is striving to adorn us with divine beauty, with the meekness of Christ and the triumph of mercy. - Fr. Jonathan



Being Busy does not equal Being Full

We long for true wholeness and with our busy lives we can feel poured out and without any time for renewal. **Take 5 minutes**, before sleep and give to God anything weighing on. **Be still** and without any concern of "needing" to be more than you currently are in that moment. For 5 minutes. **Say the Jesus Prayer** or simply let your thoughts be calm without chasing anything. Like St. Paisios teaches to **let thoughts pass by** like clouds, they come and they go. We do not need to chase every emotion,. We do not need to bring every stress into our orbit. We do however want to **enter Christ's orbit**, that is where He is our center and all we do revolves around His love and His peace. That can sound like a tall order, but what a truth from His own lips as tells us He is always with us**, and we say Christ is "in our midst!"*** often. So how do we stay in that trajectory not veering too left or too right? That is is the daily struggle of taking a moment every so often, off the screens, and dropping the anchor of prayer, with the remembrance of God and not believing in the lie that we are ever on our own.

*Dr. Ioana Popa's thoughtful and reflective quote.
** MT28:20
***Common Orthodox greeting, “Christ is in our midst!” resposne: “He is and ever shall be!”(varied forms of this exist)

Spiritual Advice from Elder Dionise Ignat

(From Romanian Colin Skate, Mt. Athos)

Parish Administrator (official title given used the diocese)

God cares more about our salvation than we ourselves do.
†
God gave us a great divine grace: the freedom of choice. God doesn’t force us to be saved; He doesn’t take our freedom away. And because of this, we use our freedom of choice for our passions and by this, chase away God’s grace from us – especially through egotism and pride.
†
As I see things, humanity has changed a lot today. Before, life was hard; people had to work hard and lived in poverty and sorrow, but there was much spiritual joy and holy simplicity. There are many facilities today, but because we don’t know how to use them for God, they distance us from Him. There is much turmoil in our souls; there is no more of that simple joy. This is how I see things: humanity has become weak.
†
The wisdom of this world is madness before God. That is to say, if you don’t believe that God gave us the discoveries and facilities of the modern world, you distance yourself from Him. You believe that everything comes from humankind, with our powers.
†
God is love. The one who has love is in God. God is peace. We need love for our neighbor, not only for our friends, but also for our enemies.
†
Without love, no asceticism has any value – love, peace, and the protection of obedience.
†
I prayed to the Mother of God to give me a gift – to stop me from grumbling that I went blind – and she had mercy on me. She made me understand that it is good for me to be like this. And now I am at peace. It has been good, and it is good for me to be like this.
†
However long you might want to live, you will live as much as God has ordained—not a minute more.
†
Salvation is so easy if we are sincere – but we are so sly…woe to us.
†
If we don’t transgress before God, God blesses us, and we are always joyful because our soul is not irritated or burdened.
†
Never say: “I have the right to do this,” because it is self-justification and exaltation of your mind; this way, you will believe more in the opinions of your mind than in others’ advice.
†
Everything – the soul, the new man – must be built on a solid foundation, on a rock, from the very beginning. This is so we can remove our own views, our hidden passions, and the exaltation of our minds, all of which can shatter the entire house of our souls when we get close to the end, near death.

Translated from “Geronda Dionisie from Colciu: Wisdom from the Holy Mountain Athos”, Predania Press
To learn more about Elder Dionisie Ignat:



Parish Bylaws and Board Functions

Questions from our parish
What is a Church Board?

- by Fr. Jonathan Bannon

Parish Administrator (official title given used the diocese)

Parish Board President Jeremy Erber did a great job explaining the healthy and good role of a parish board and why we have them in Orthodox churches here in the United States.

To help further educate on the role of a parish board according to ACROD bylaws as well as rhetoric on the service of a priest and other parish ministries, this bulletin offers select bylaws to assist.
The bylaws of our Diocese will be available on our parish website soon.

The Church Board:

A Church Board is in addition to the pastor, an elected group of parishioners who are in good standing sacramentally and with stewardship with their parish that assist the priest according to the bylaws with the following: The peace and harmony of the parish. The business aspect of caring for and keeping records of giving, donations, and the care of the properties.

Who is the board? (As per diocesan ACROD bylaws)

1) Pastor - Parish Administrator	- Fr. Jonathan Bannon	(Assigned to parish 2013)
2) Parish Board President	- Maurice AlMassad	Nov. 2024 -26)
3) Parish Board Vice President	-Curtis (Panagiotis) Barnes	Nov. 2024 - 26)
4) Treasurer	- Jenna (Genevieve) Shedd	Nov. 2024 - 26)
5) Financial Secretary	- David Shinn	Nov. 2024 - 26)
6) Recording Secretary)	- Amber Hackewicz	2025-26)

How are meetings held and who attends?

The Parish Priest calls the official meetings of the parish.
The Parish Board President conducts the official meetings of the parish.
No official meetings will take place without the opportunity for the Priest: or parish administrator to be present.

Everyone in good standing sacramentally and with stewardship may attend the monthly board meetings and have a voice and vote at the annual parish meeting.

From the Bylaws of the Diocese: On Parish Administrator
Bylaw 56.
The priest is a servant of God, a Spiritual Father, endowed with the qualifications required by the Sacred Canons, who by the laying on of hands of the Bishop has received the Divine Grace of the Sacrament of Holy Priesthood; to consecrate and offer the true Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ; to forgive and retain sins; and to confer and administer the other sacraments pertaining to his Holy Order; to preach the Word of God, and to govern the faithful under the authority of and in obedience to the Bishop of the Diocese.

Bylaw 60. The Pastor of every Parish is an Independent Contractor and not an employee of the Parish.

(This is shared to deter the perception that a priest "works for a board like an employee and has a boss or bosses outside of the ruling hierarch of the diocese), as was stated in the annual meeting last month. In our young country, immigrating congregations often built a church first and then hired a priest as they looked to join a diocese if they were not already part of one. This can cause a perception around the authority of a board called "congregationalism" who decades ago would "hire" a priest causing a subservient relationship clergy has with them. It is an non-Orthodox perception. To note: There are out of date bylaws that speak of a parish having the ability to vote out clergy and such expressions have been removed from use given their unOrthodox spirit. Even recently from our bylaws as a diocese.

Bylaw 67 (L)
The Pastor must administer the Sacraments to his Parishioners as often as they shall lawfully request it and shall give his services free of charge to those who are unable to make an offering or pay a fee. It is his sacred duty to admonish his erring Parishioners and he shall see that nothing shall be done against faith and morals in his Parish. He shall help as best he can the poor, widows and orphans and shall take special care of the sick and prepare those who are dying for a pious Christian death. He shall be particularly solicitous that the children of his Parish are instructed in the Orthodox Faith.

Bylaws on Board Positions:

138. President
The President, conducts all parish meetings.

139. If the Pastor refuses to call a Parish meeting, the President with the approval of the Church Board or upon demand by the majority of the legal members of the Parish shall call such a Parish meeting.

140. Financial Secretary
The duty of the Financial Secretary is to provide a detailed accounting of all incomes and expenditures of the church;

141. Prepares the annual, semi-annual, and quarterly financial statements of the Parish; and

142. Prepares a monthly statement for the monthly meeting of the Board.

143. Recording Secretary:

The Duty of the Recording Secretary is to conduct the minutes of all parish meetings, and assists the Financial Secretary in all financial matters of the Parish;

144. Takes the place of Financial Secretary in his/her absences and

145. Assists the Financial Secretary in preparing the annual financial statement of the Parish, and also assists in preparing the monthly statement for the meeting of the Church Board.

146. Treasurer
The duty of the Treasurer is to accept all Parish monies from whatever source, and each week deposits them in the bank at interest or in a checking account as instructed by the Church Board;

147. Keeps a written detailed record of all monies accepted from the above mentioned sources and disbursements.

148. All checks drawn on the Church account from all expenditures shall have two signatures of either the Pastor, President, Treasurer, or Financial Secretary or according to the prevailing custom in the Parish.

149. Auditor(s)
The duty of the auditor(s) is to oversee the above mentioned officers at all times, and they have the right to request a correct accounting from them, and shall conduct an audit of the Church books and records at least annually.

Religious Education

102. Every Parish shall be obliged to maintain a religious school for the education of its youth.
103. The courses of study and text books shall be prescribed for all Parishes in the Diocese by the Bishop and the Consistory, who shall appoint a Priest as Diocesan Supervisor of Schools to administer

103. The courses of study and text books shall be prescribed for all Parishes in the Diocese by the Bishop and the Consistory, who shall appoint a Priest as Diocesan Supervisor of Schools to administer and direct the entire system.

105. The Parishes are obliged to accept such uniform and systematized parochial school training as prescribed.

106. The Pastor of each Parish shall be responsible for the Religious education of the children of the Parish and is the head of the Sunday Church School. He may organize a board of several dedicated parishioners (including Sunday Church School Teachers) to aid him in implementing the Sunday Church School Program in the Parish.

107. In addition to a Sunday Church School, every Parish shall maintain a religious library for the use of faithful in which sufficient number of Orthodox and religious books and publications will be placed periodically.

Parish Librarian: Amber Hackewicz

Atrium / Montessori Catechesis of the Good Shepherd on Sunday's at 9:15 to 9:45 AM

Teacher: Laura Warmke

Other Associations

108. All other associations such as the Sr. and Jr. ACRY, Daylight, youth movement, Parish fraternal societies, Parish societies, Mothers' clubs, etc. whose purpose shall be to progress, aid, comfort, uplift, advance and educate the faithful belonging to this Diocese, shall be aided by the active co-operation of the Pastors of the Parishes.

109. It is strongly urged that the Pastors shall interest themselves in the cultivation of the youth and societies promoting their education and advancement.

120. The revenue of Parishes shall be applied: - First, to the support and maintenance of the Pastor, the assistant to the Pastor, Cantor, and any person regularly employed by the Parish; secondly, for the erection and necessary repairs of the church building; the Pastor's home and other buildings and property that belong to the Parish; thirdly, for the support of the Diocese.

123. Every Parish must secure ecclesiastical approval in accordance with the Church law before erecting a church building, chapel, shrine, iconostasis, altar, baldacchino, education unit, rectory, cemetery, etc.

PARISH MEMBERSHIP

124. A Congregation or Parish shall consist of the Pastor, as its spiritual head, and of lay members who are Orthodox Christians.

125. "Any person who shall deny, disclaim or refuse conformity by word or deed to the Doctrine, Discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Church **shall cease to be a member of the Parish and also of the Diocese** even if he or she shall have continued to meet his or her financial obligations to the Parish, and shall not be eligible to any office, nor be allowed to vote in any meetings, nor be allowed to exercise any office or function in, concerning, or connected with the Parish or with the Diocese.

126. It is the duty of every member of the Parish to glorify God, to seek His gifts of grace by receiving the Holy Sacraments instituted by Our Lord, Jesus Christ, to faithfully attend the Divine Services in their Church, to diligently pray for each other, for the Bishop, for their Pastor, and for all their superiors, to fearlessly profess Christ and the teachings of His Church, to bring others to Christ and to His Church, to adorn their faith with a sober, righteous and godly life, to obey and abide by the Laws of God and His Church, to honor and respect their Pastor and to assist him in his work, to give a Christian training to their children and send them to their church school for catechetical instruction, to contribute liberally toward the financial support of their Parish and of the Diocese in proportion to their means, to live peaceably with one another, to help those who are in need and in distress, and in general, to seek, as much as in them lies, to further the life and growth of their Parish.

127. All Orthodox Christians are exhorted to accept their Pastor's invitation to Holy Communion: "So Strachom Boziim, Luboviju, I viroju pristupite" (With the fear of God, and with faith and love, come froward), and to cleanse their souls of sin in Holy Confession and receive the Holy Eucharist frequently, but they must do so at least once a year within the Lenten Season in order to be members in good-standing of the Parish.

Bylaw 130. The Church Board, charged with the administration of the temporal affairs of the Parish, shall consist of the following:

Pastor
President
Vice-President
Financial Secretary
Treasurer / Auditors /

132. The members of the Church Board/ Parish Council hold the congregation property in trust and are considered merely executive officers of the congregation to execute the majority will of the legal members of the parish and have no right to decide in the change of ownership of the property, its sale, transfer, barter or mortgage.

Bylaws on Official Meetings and the Peace and Harmony of a Parish:

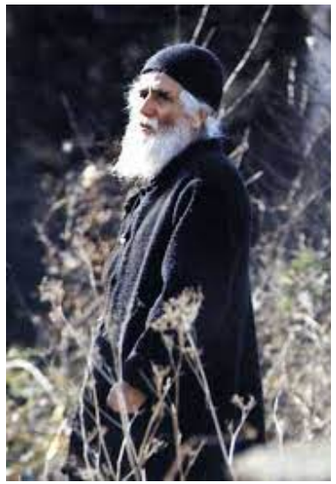
136. No official act of the Church Board or Parish shall take effect without knowledge of the Pastor and his having an opportunity of being heard; and in the involuntary or necessary absence of the Pastor, no business in the Parish or Church Board shall be finally disposed of, of such a character that the Pastor, as the head of the parish, has a right to be heard in it.

137. It is the duty of the officers of the Church Board to assist the Pastor in his performance of duties of his office, particularly in the cultivation of harmony among the members, and in the promotion of the general welfare of the parish.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

All others are Saints... we are the sinner.

St. Paisios the Athonite spoke:



"You must also view all the others as saints.

And to see only yourself as a sinner, the smallest among all, even if other people may be sinners.

We have no right to see them sinners. We have no right to judge them! We have no right to speak against a sinner.

We have to see only ourselves as sinners, and the smallest among all!

...

Let our soul always thirst for the knowledge of the truth,

let it thirst for the forgiveness of sins,

let it thirst for the peace of consciousness,

Let it thirst for the heavenly joy!

The most beautiful thirst is the one for the union with Jesus Christ!

Let it thirst for the Holy Communion!

Let it thirst for the acquisition of virtues!

Let it thirst for entering as quickly as possible into the Kingdom of Heaven, to free itself as soon as possible from the vanity of this world, to free itself from pain, from sorrow, from torment, from the wickedness which reigns in the hearts of people!

For becoming free!

For freeing ourselves from passions!

And finally, let our soul thirst for the eternal joy!

Let it thirst for the union with God, so that we may live forever with the saints!

Because... how long will be our life here on earth?"

On the Jesus Prayer

By Fr. Gheorghe Calciu gives us precious details about the Prayer of the Heart, the fruits of this prayer and the signs of delusion. Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa (1925–2006) spent a total of 21 years in prison for his Christian evangelism and criticism of the communist regime in Romania.

Fr. Gheorghe Calciu:
You close your eyes, and direct your inner attention towards the heart.
The [spiritual] heart is not really here where we hear it, but somewhere above.
This is the place of the spiritual heart. When you make this connection, the mind begins to follow the spiritual direction of the heart.

THEN YOUR ENTIRE BEING WILL CHANGE. AND THEN, TRULY, THE POWER OF PRAYER CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.

Maybe we won't get there, but what's important is to organize your prayer life in such a way that you pray with your mind and heart as well. When you pray, you will feel a warmth, when you truly pray, when your heart descends into your heart, you will feel a warmth. If this warmth comes from below up, then it is from the devil, don't be deceived! If this warmth comes from above down, or finds a place in heart without passing from the lower part of the body, then, it is the Holy Spirit, who abides in you. You might even reach this state, after a long time…

I won't make now an extended exposition of the Jesus Prayer, I will say just a few words.

PRAY! PRAY EVEN FOR FIVE MINUTES! FOR FIVE MINUTES YOU MUST NOT ALLOW EVEN A SINGLE STRAY THOUGHT, EXCEPT FOR THE THOUGHT TOWARDS GOD, AND FEEL AROUND YOU THE FLUTTER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PRESENCE.

Next time I will talk more about the Jesus Prayer… And then you will feel how the Holy Spirit visits you, rarely in the beginning, but then more and more often, until it rests in your heart for long time.

I saw a man, a man who used to pray the Jesus Prayer. He was Father Benedict Ghiuş. He was already old and would rarely serve at the altar, because of his old age. He was at the Cernica Monastery [Bucharest, Romania], and when he was walking through the alleys of Cernica, or in the church, he was like a saint, like floating. Although he wasn't smiling, his face was radiating happiness. I had a revelation about him when I went to Cernica to serve the liturgy, and he was sitting on a chair somewhere over there, in a corner, in semi-darkness, in the altar. And the more he advanced in prayer, the brighter the father's corner became. If you had looked at him, you wouldn't have seen any halo above his head. But you would have seen that the entire corner where he was sitting, was brighter than the rest of the altar. The altar was illuminated by candles, not light bulbs. And then I understood what the practice of Jesus Prayer means. I knew about him (everyone did) that he practiced the Prayer of the Heart…

HE REACHED SUCH HIGH STAGES, THAT TROUGH THE PRAYER WHICH WAS UNCEASINGLY UTTERED BY HIS HEART AS HIS MIND AS WELL, HE WOULD EMANATE SUCH LIGHT AROUND HIM… THAT WAS SOMETHING MIRACULOUS…

Monks say that when you pray the Jesus Prayer and you reach the perfect form of this prayer, then even if you preach, or talk to someone, or sell candles, or do other things, dig in the garden, tend the flowers, your heart and mind unceasingly sings: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Unceasingly, without pause and without separation from God. As if the mind would divide itself in two parts, one preoccupied with the daily tasks, and another one which maintains a permanent relationship with God!

MAYBE WE DON'T SEEK TO REACH THAT STAGE, BUT GOD IS GREAT, HOLY SPIRIT FULFILLS EVERYTHING!

STORIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER

Elder Ephraim Katounakiotis once told the following story,

“An elder says to his novice:

– Read the Jesus Prayer.

– I read it, but I don’t understand it.

– The devil understands it and runs away.

– This is too difficult for me.

– Okay, do you want to see a miracle?

– Yes, I want to see a miracle, father.

– All right, – says the elder, – I will pray that the Lord will show you a miracle, so that you understand the power of the Jesus Prayer.

– Okay.

After praying and fasting for three days, the elder calls the novice:

– Come here. Now take this basket, go up to the spring and fill it with water.

– Forgive me, father, – the novice says, – but I haven’t lost my mind yet. Fill the basket with water?

– Didn’t you say you wanted to see a miracle and the power of the Jesus Prayer? Have you changed your mind already?

– No, I still want it.

– Well then, do as I tell you. Do not forget that you need to be reading the Jesus Prayer all the time.

– Your blessing. – says the novice and goes to the spring, repeating the words of the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me…” He puts the basket in the spring. The water fills the basket without spilling anywhere. In the meantime, the novice continues to pray, while the elder is also praying in his cell, that the Lord would show a miracle to His servant. Seeing the basket filled with water, the novice runs in a hurry to show it to the elder. While he is on his way, the devil in human guise appears to him and says:

– Where are you going, monk?

– To my elder.

– What is your name?

— George.

— How many years have you been a monk?

– Five or six.

– What kind of work do you do?

– I make seals for prosphora.

While the novice is busy talking, the water begins to pour out, and he returns to the elder with an empty basket.

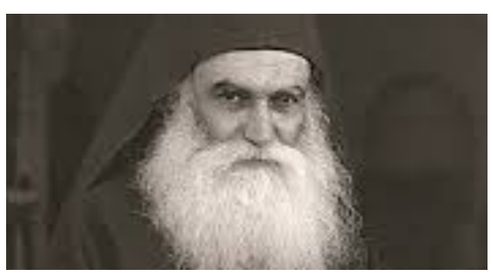
– What happened?

– So and so, father.

– You have abandoned the prayer, my child, that’s why the water poured out. You see, while you were reading the prayer, the basket was holding water, but when you stopped and began idle talk, the water poured out.

If you want to become a good monk, do not leave the Jesus Prayer. Your prayer goes along with your merit.

Two phrases should always be on a monk’s lips: “May it be blessed” when you need to do something, and “forgive me” when you need to ask for an apology. At the same time, your mind must be consumed with prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE JESUS PRAYER?

from Blessed Elder Aimilianos of Simonos Petras

The purpose of the [Jesus] Prayer is not a method, nor the words, or the place, or hesychia [stillness], or something else which this prayer involves.

We can say that the purpose of the Prayer is what is being worked by God in you.

What God works in our inner being… What He works is an experience. But it is not only the experience of God! It is also a revelation of the way He comes, of how the coming of God happens. The Personal God within the human personality… And of course, He comes in Light!

And one still feels and understands at the end of his or her ascent, the union which is performed… And with this union, the purification comes, the spiritual advancement comes, the growth of the little baby which is being born into man.

Even more, the Spirit gives one a permanent divine state from which he or she climbs towards illumination, towards light, towards a flourishing on different levels which God offers and opens to us. The purpose of Prayer, in a word, we could say, is a perfect mystery of the unseen God, the One now felt, and the visible person… a mystery performed by God. This mystery has been revealed to us by the Fathers of the Church.

We also know from experience, always, how to become a recipient of God. Not through reasoning and meditation, but in a way that God penetrates the human person, and transforms it entirely. And so, he or she becomes a person who can taste, understand and comprehend this mystery.

Now that we’re talking about the purpose of the Prayer, we have to note something… There are several higher levels to which man ascends when he or she practices the Jesus Prayer. But, for the moment, we set them aside. Because, we can’t talk about something that only a person knows, and only he or she can reveal it to another person.

So, it is a continuous climb. It is an ever-rising communion, perfect, unchanging. I mean, no person changes, neither one, nor the other. There is a divine vision and a communion with the unseen. This person lives this greatness… He or she lives the godly things in an inexpressible joy and happiness. And in his way, he runs without any obstacle, but, however, without being able to tell it to the others. He is the one who experienced it, he carried it, and hence, this man which climbs to the highest levels of prayer, which unfold in the depths of the heart.

These steps, this advancement of man, can’t be interpreted by us, dear Mr. Werner, on the TV screen. It’s something that cannot be observed by the human reasoning. From now on we should let God to search for the people who want it, fight for it and succeed to go up there with divine help.