



Pastor's Corner

The Very Rev. Fr. Matthew MacKay

The state of our parish is one of growth and maturity. We are adding families and individuals to our community, which is a very good and exciting thing to do. Having the Orthodox faith and a very friendly and inviting atmosphere here is critical to continuing this work and ministry. Even though being Orthodox is a tremendous responsibility, we need to make sure that we always speak the truth about Jesus Christ and His church in love. It is up everyone here to make sure all visitors feel welcome, accepted, and incorporated into the life of our parish. We need to be like the friendly doorman, greeting, welcoming, and opening the door for everyone. We ought not be a "gatekeeper" guarding the front door keeping people out so that no one can come in.

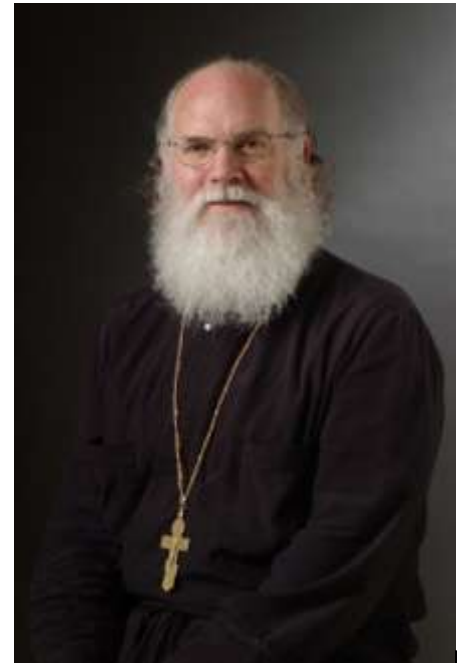
God is continuing to bless us here at St. Joseph with growth and maturity and we need to be grateful and good stewards of these gifts. We have 88 families that claim us as their home parish. Out of this we have 67 children. As Holy Scripture says we as good shepherds must raise up our youth in the ways of the Lord; we do this through quality education. Because of continued faithful efforts of our Sunday School teachers we have a very active and informative educational program for children and adults. As Bishop Basil would say, "it would behoove" all parents to ensure that their children are here every week for Sunday School. How else are we going to pass on to the next generation the Orthodox faith and practices that were given to us?

This continuing education is a sign of our maturity and so is our reaching out to the needy. We had another very successful Benefit Concert that raised \$8,000 for Project Mexico. My hope and prayer is that we will continue to improve and do these concerts for years to come. They not only help the less fortunate but they are tools for evangelism. (Look how the Orthodox bring Christ into the world.)

Our future goals are for continued faithful growth and maturity:

1. Improve our education for children and adults.
2. Support as many Teens as possible to go to Camp St. Raphael.
3. Improve our facilities here (remodel Hall, erect bell tower, build adult baptismal font, continue iconography, replace mismatched chairs in sanctuary, and repair roof.
4. Have a successful 2009 Stewardship campaign where all of our 88 families pledge.

+May God grant us the courage, strength and discernment as we continue to bring God's Kingdom and His presents into a reality here, at home and in the community; doing His Will now and in the future. Amen!





Sunday School

Deacon Meletios Marx



Proverbs 22:6 tells us to “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is not just a command but a privilege we have as parents and Sunday School teachers. At St. Joseph Orthodox Church, this privilege is training up our children in the way of the Holy Orthodox faith. We have many classes which provide teaching for our children’s life long journey in Orthodoxy. The two and three year old class (known as the Pre Pre-K) are taught about the love of God and bible heroes who listened to God. The Pre-K and K continue to teach about God’s love through song and myriads of hands on activities. The children begin to learn about the different feasts and seasons in the Church. The 1st and 2nd grade class continues to learn about many aspects of the Church through a multitude of senses. Their learning is strengthened by arts and crafts which assist in building a tangible and visual reminder of learned spiritual truths. The 3rd through 5th grade class addresses life in the Church and life in Jesus. The children are introduced to the lives of the saints with a focus on emulating their attributes.

The Middle School class explores the historical aspect of the early Church through St. Paul’s journeys and period of Christian persecution. The High School class learns how to be critical thinkers in relation to their Orthodox faith. Numerous topics are explored, with an Orthodox perspective, which teaches them to apply their knowledge. Our adults are not left out of the loop. Fr.

James Early leads the adult Sunday School class in a multitude of directed studies into various books found in the New Testament and Father Matthew helps educate our catechumens.

I would like to give special thanks and recognition to all of the teachers who make up our illustrious Sunday School program. Sh. Kristi Marx instructs the 2 and 3 year olds. Kathy Bassila, Gina Butuc, and Aileen Clark instruct the Pre-K and Kindergarten class. Kh. Lynn MacKay and Yasmine Incaprera instruct the 1st and 2nd grade class. Dn. Meletios Marx instructs the 3rd through 5 grade class. Kathy Burns and Kathy Luckenbach (i.e. K to the second power) instruct the Middle School program. Michael Craney and Cyril Mickiewicz instruct the High School Program.

For all of our teachers’ and parents’ tireless and fervent dedication teaching our youth, may God bless you richly and abundantly.

In Christ,
Deacon Meletios

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world: for thereby they that worshipped the stars were instructed by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high, O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Please remember to bring donations of nonperishable food to St. Joseph this season to be shared with a local food bank.

Food banks in Houston and across the US are running short on supplies as donations are decreasing as a result of the downturn in the economy. They need our help! Thank you. *Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. Matthew 25:40*



On Silence

Fr. James Early

Recently I read [*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*](#). It is a delightful book, chock full of wisdom. I was really struck by one saying of St. Anthony the Great that I came across in *The Sayings*:

He who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from three conflicts: hearing, speech, and sight. (Saying number 11)

I am convinced that these three conflicts are among the greatest obstacles that all of us (not just monastics) have. Hearing, speech, and sight are areas through which the devil can not only tempt us, but drag us down, if we are not watchful.

In the next few newsletters, I would like to reflect on each of these three conflicts in turn. First, let us consider the conflict of hearing.

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!
(Psalm 46:10)

When I was a missionary in Tuzla, Bosnia, I spent a great deal of time in the homes of locals, trying to speak to them about Jesus, the Bible, the Church, and other spiritual matters. Without exception, when I first entered a home, there would be either a TV or a radio (and sometimes both) blaring away. After exchanging greetings and pleasantries, and after I was given the obligatory cup of Turkish coffee, my host and I would sit down to talk "business." At first, I assumed that they would turn off the TV and/or radio, so that we could hear each other and communicate clearly. Usually, however, this did not happen; the radio or TV would keep right on blaring, even as I was trying to discuss matters of eternal significance. I always found that annoying, and sometimes I even asked the host to turn off the source of noise. They always complied, but they looked at me as if I was a little crazy.

From all these experiences, I learned a lesson: Bosnian people don't like silence! But it's not just Bosnians, is it? We Americans are just as uncomfortable with silence and prone to fill our heads with non-stop noise, aren't we? This even happens in my own home! I often come home from work to be greeted by a blaring TV, and sometimes, no one is even watching it.

I believe that the constant noise that the world throws at us is a tyranny (St. Anthony calls it the "conflict" of "hearing") that we must free ourselves from. If we are serious about growing in Christ, we must free ourselves from the uncomfortableness that we feel toward silence, and embrace it. I am reminded of the following passage in 1 Kings in which Elijah has just fled from the wicked king Ahab and his even more wicked queen Jezebel:

Then [God] said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

It is usually in moments of silence that God speaks to us, in a "still small voice." So let us turn off the TV, the radio, the computer, and yea, even the podcasts (ouch!). Let us take more time to sit in silence before God to pray, meditate, read the Scriptures and the Fathers, or just to listen to see if He has anything to say from us. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by doing so.



DOT Update

Mayada Yacoub

The Daughters of the Theotokos are focusing on a few fundraisers in order to pay for the renovations in the Hall.

- Our garage sale was a great success this year. Thanks to Kh. Lynn for organizing this event and Gary Lear for helping.
- This year we are going to celebrate our 4th annual New Year's Eve party. This year, Larry Monks has graciously agreed to be our DJ and it has been decided that we will play multicultural music so everyone can be satisfied. The menu will have delicious food that hopefully everyone is going to enjoy. Champagne will be served promptly at 12:00 AM . This event has been successful for the past four years and this year is going to be even better with your support and participation. The money that we raise will be used toward remodeling the hall so that it can be better for not only us, but for the people that lease it from time to time. **Tickets will be available on November 16th, so be sure to order early and reserve your seat.** As parishioners of St. Joseph we are a family and it will be great to celebrate the new year with one another! Make sure to invite your family and friends to make this event even more special!
- Our famous Souper Bowl is coming up in February and as in other years we will be able to sample various new soup recipes.

We are still deciding on numerous other fundraisers that will be presented further in the year, so watch for updates!

Prayer Request

If you have a prayer request for someone please contact Fr. Matthew or Irene Fedikovich and give either one of them the name(s) of those to be added to the list. Also, specify the type of prayer requested. Alternatively, you may fill out a Prayer Request Form



Give a Gift of Love This Christmas

As your family prepares for the Feast of the Nativity, please remember your brothers and sisters in need. Your support of IOCC brings life-sustaining programs to children and families suffering from war, poverty, disease, man-made and natural disasters. May you and yours enjoy the true nature of the Christmas feast this year. Please share it with others by supporting the work of IOCC.

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International Orthodox Christian Charities

Teen Soyo



Teen SOYO enjoyed our recent trip to the bowling alley. Although we were somewhat embarrassed by the semi-professionals in the adjacent lane, we still had a great time. Some of our members even broke the coveted 100-point mark! Congratulations to Christine and Sean for being the high scorers.

We are looking forward to our next gathering in December and which will be oriented towards serving others. We plan to deliver goodie bags (made by younger members of St. Joseph) to cancer patients at a local hospital. Thanks to Sh. Kristi Marx for the idea. In 2009, we hope to hold a Wii Sports tournament and also join forces with Sunday School to coordinate an event that corresponds with topics from their class.

To ensure that your teen is on the SOYO list or to offer suggestions for future activities, please contact Eddie or Melissa Brega.



From the Chair



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ is in our midst!

Since our last General Assembly, the following points list some of our accomplishments at St. Joseph's:

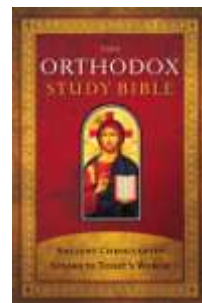
- Our pledging families have increased to 56 families. This number has remained about the same as last year (53), yet we have 85 families (10 more than last year) in our church directory. With the intercession of St. Joseph and the generosity of those pledging families, we have been able to pay the bills each month.
- We have 6 new icon stands and an awesome chanter's stand. If you didn't realize, I use a step stool to read my music!
- An outstanding and successful Benefit Concert in spite of IKE. We hope to send over \$7000 after expenses to Project Mexico.
- The structural damage of our dome and church has increased due to IKE. The insurance company will cover all damages including the building structural damage. What a blessing!
- Members of the finance committee have successfully re-negotiated our mortgage interest rate from 7.5% to 6.25%. Our payments will not change but more of the payment will be applied to balance of the mortgage instead of interest.
- We donated \$1020 to the Bishop Basil Endowment fund last year. Once again this year the monies collected for our Parish Nativity Card will be earmarked for the BB fund. I will start collecting for the Parish card on Nov 9th through Dec 7th.
- We had to add security cameras to protect our buildings after we had a break-in.
- Another successful and fun New Year's Eve Party which raised over \$1000 used toward church hall renovations. Once again we will continue our tradition and hold another party! The DOT ladies will plan the event and monies will go toward more church hall renovations.
- Purchased new software program to upgrade significantly our treasury system.
- Hosted the 1st marriage retreat in the Houston area. It was a successful Pan-Orthodox event.

As I begin another term as Parish Council Chair, I accept the responsibility to be a steward of the Lord, returning to God my rightful tithe and offering. I hope during our pledge campaign you will be a steward of the Lord as well.

It will soon be Advent (Nativity) Fast and our time of preparation for the coming of the Lord bearing gifts in thanksgiving for the greatest Gift of all, Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Faithfully yours in Christ,
Helen (Eleni) Norton

Volunteer with Fr. James on Saturday, November 22 at Star of Hope from 11:30 – 1:30 p.m. Up to six adults are needed to assist with preparing, serving, and cleaning up the lunch meal at the Women and Family Emergency Shelter, located at 419 Dowling, Houston, Texas 77004.



Visit St. Joseph's Bookstore & Library! Orthodox Study Bible, Prayer Rope, Orthodox Books, Pamphlets, Orthodox Jewelry, Candles, CD's ...



Tithing as an Investment

Russell Boyer

A long time ago, I went to an investment seminar entitled, "How to Become a Millionaire" where the instructor laid out a simple strategy. He said you should invest 10% (long term), save 10% (short term), give away 10% (charity), and then live off the remaining 70% of your income. When asked why you should give away 10% of your money (especially if you're quickly trying to become a millionaire), he responded that there is a long history of giving and that it is just a good thing to do. He also added there is a bonus benefit in the form of a tax deduction. It reminded me that it is always better to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35) The truth is when you give, there is always a bonus.

This week I traveled to Omaha, Nebraska for business. Before I left, I picked up some appropriate reading material for the trip; Warren Buffet's new memoir entitled *The Snowball and the Business of Life* by Alice Schroeder. Warren has earned the honor of being one of the best investors of our time, and the title "The Oracle of Omaha." The focus over his career has been to find superior returns at low risk. When I think of risk, from a church perspective, the Orthodox church is a very low risk investment, it's been around for 2,000 years, and there is a very high likelihood that it will be around for another 2,000 years. When I think of superior returns, from a church perspective, I think of having a facility to worship, priests to serve, and a beautiful community. But I also think of the story of the Publican and the Pharisee which teaches us that good deeds, fasting, prayer and tithing are weapons that protect us from sin. (Luke 18:9 -14) That's a return you cannot beat.

Anytime I review a potential investment, I am always struck by the warning, "past performance is not a guarantee of future results." The key ingredient is faith. We, as Americans, in general, put a lot of faith in Wall Street and our economy. So much so that the recent economic crisis has had a lot of us worried and upset about losing money. It reminded me that our treasure is not here on earth but in heaven. (Matthew 6:19-24) We always need to be careful what we put our faith in.

Thus, think of tithing as an investment and put your money where your faith is!

Camp Saint Raphael

Sean MacKay

My brother, Patrick and I have gone to Camp St Raphael for the last six years. The camp is held at a YMCA camp near Tulsa OK. It is open to kids ages 9-17. Patrick has been a Counselor in Training for the last two years. A CIT assists a counselor and works with the younger campers. I have been a camper for the entire six years. Last summer, the other members from St Joseph that attended were Audrey, Rachel (CIT), Niles, Dylan and Stacey (counselor).

There are two sessions every summer. There are two priests on the staff each session. A typical day consists of breakfast, Orthros at the chapel, Christian Education, an activity such as chanting, Ask Abouna, or arts and crafts. After that the campers go back to their cabins for cabin time. Then everyone eats lunch together in the dining hall. The afternoon consists of sports, more cabin time and dinner. We go back to the chapel for Vespers and then have an evening program. Patrick and I both agree that our favorite thing about going to camp is being around so many other Orthodox Christians our own age.



If you haven't had your pictures taken for the new directory, there is still time! Get your photo taken during coffee hour by Eddie and Melissa Brega or email your favorite family photo to MrBrega@gmail.com

Young Adults Ministries (YAM) at St. Joseph

The decision to adopt some ascetic endeavor should come from within. In the same way, a sick man sometimes finds a remedy or antidote by intuition, by a kind of spontaneous craving for it.

-St. Theophan the Recluse

Dear St. Joseph Young Adults,

For those of you that are not already familiar with Young Adults Ministries (YAM) we are a group of Orthodox lay persons from numerous Houston-area parishes who are committed to the promotion of fel-
lowship, witness, service, and worship. Our spiritual director is Father Nicholas Hadzellis from the Annunciation Orthodox Cathedral. If you are interested in learning more about specific events or meeting times/ places, please go to the website www.yamhouston.org.

YAM began about one year ago and, to the best of my knowledge, is the only group of this type in the Houston area. When I first heard about this organization, I envisioned some sort of social group that might be fun if I didn't have too many other commitments. My opinion changed after my first service project at the Beacon day shelter. In the past, my idea of service had always been cutting a check to go to a foreign country. The experience of directly serving someone face-to-face in my own community was radically different from anything I had done before. I realized that these activities were much more than "something nice to do." Rather, this was like finding some vitamin that I didn't know I needed. Now, I consider serving with YAM an essential part of my Christian life.

Our next Beacon session will be December 20. I really hope that you will give this one particular consideration as it is right before Christmas. If you haven't been yet, this will be the perfect event to get your feet wet.

On Thursday 12/11 we will have a slightly different Fellowship Dinner. We will meet at St. George for a spaghetti dinner. A speaker at this dinner will give a presentation on a spiritual theme. This will be an interesting (and I hope informative) change of pace. Please let me know if you have interest or availability for any of the above. My cell number is

281.682.2973

For all of you who are wondering about how to make Orthodoxy known to Houston, I urge you to consider YAM. For all of you who are wondering about how to continue your Orthodox life from Monday through Saturday, I urge you to consider YAM. Finally, there has been some confusion about how we are defining "young adult." Simply put: 18-40(ish). YAM is made up of recent college grads, grad students, young couples, singles, and parents of young families. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In Christ,
Cyril Mickiewicz

Unless the Lord Comes to Us: Advent Reflections

Ginny Nieuwsma

Unless the Lord comes to us, we are completely helpless.
-St. Maximos, Greek ascetic, the 4th Century

It is November 16 as I write this. My mailbox is now brimming every day with glossy catalogs proclaiming the virtues of the triumphant, capitalistic existence of comfort and indulgence that we have all imbibed to one degree or another.

Yet on this second day of the Orthodox Advent season, I am acutely aware of my spiritual poverty. I have charged through my days heedless, as the mellowed northern California fall sun has illumined a fiery display of gold and magenta, flaming orange and russet red. Glory to God! the colors have shouted, but most of the time I have been too busy to stop and notice. My cell phone rings, my car needs gas, my errand list is a mile long, my work beckons, and my children need rides or tutoring or food. Squeezing in morning prayers here and there and attending church on Sunday, I nod to God before getting back to the "real" business at hand.

Sometimes I am running from Him, burying myself with my busyness because I don't want to be alone with Him. I'm avoiding the silence of prayer and time spent before our icons, because it is there that I confront myself stripped away of any false pretense of piety. This confrontation with my sin and hard heartedness is painful; indeed, trying to practice the disciplines of the Church in the midst of Christmas season is definitely an uphill climb! I don't want to think about fasting, or almsgiving, or being more consistent in prayer. (*continued...*)

Young adults: Visit http://www.iocc.org/getinvolved_internship1.aspx for upcoming information about their internship programs.

Unless the Lord Comes to Us *continued*

Yet mercifully, the longing for God's presence regularly surfaces despite the noise and distractions. Oftentimes I am acutely aware of the void within, as was the Psalmist when he plaintively penned, "As a deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42).

It always seems that, just when I need it, the holy season of Advent arrives. Rather than being burdensome, the spiritual habits and proscriptions given to us in the Church are a lifeline. Certainly, there have been times when I have struggled to understand why we approach Christmas with such sobriety. This is a season for parties! For gifts! For happy celebrations! For family! What's this fasting in the midst, this remembrance of His death, these extra services that mirror the somber services of Holy Week?

Father Thomas Hopko explains in his book, *The Winter Pascha*:

"The Lord's birth and baptism are directly connected to His dying and rising. He was born in order to die...the harmony between the events is overwhelming...Jesus lay as an infant in the cavern in the reign of Caesar Augustus that He might lay in the tomb under Pontius Pilate. He was hounded by Herod that He might be caught by Caiaphas...He was worshipped by wise men that the whole of creation might adore Him in His triumph over death."

Christ comes to us, then, and we do rejoice, for we are indeed helpless and have no life apart from Him. But the shadow of a cross falls over the tender and peaceful scene at the stable. His suffering life, His sacrifice, the weight of the world's sins; all are implicit in, and present at, His birth. So our Advent celebrations should be tempered by this reality; in a sense, the bright Lenten sadness is there at the manger, too.

How can we prepare for Christ's arrival?

***By increasing our prayer.** Advent is a time to remember that in God, we move and breathe and have our being, and we must be *with* Him and consciously *in* Him before we can have authentic love and relationship with others.

***By giving alms.** There is something almost poetic about giving money and perhaps even more important in these busy times, our time, to others who are in need at Christmas time. We can battle our self-indulgence with self-sacrifice, by giving freely, with joy and gratitude to God for His good gifts to us.

***By going to Church more often.** The Advent season provides extra opportunities to be in the atmosphere of worship. Isn't it true that when we walk into the doors of our parishes, and those doors swing shut behind us, the flickering candles and the sights and smells of icons and incense before us, aid us in our seasonal preparations? Sometimes it is so hard to get there, but the rewards are always great.

***By remembering some of the unique and remarkable saints of the Advent season.** Of course, we remember St. Nicholas (December 6), but what about some of the others? St. Herman of Alaska (December 13) exemplified the spirit of this time of year to perfection. St. Stephen the Protomartyr is remembered on December 26, and on New Year's Day, we commemorate the brilliant St. Basil.

***By going to confession.** If there is any act out of step with the vain and glib holiday atmosphere presented to us by the spirit of this age, it is act of the repentant Christian confessing his or her sins. Blessed are those who mourn, for it is precisely in this mourning that we receive comfort. These are the tidings of comfort and joy that the Christmas carol songwriter celebrates—redemption from guilt and the weight of sin!

***By incorporating the Church's traditions** in ways that make sense for us here and now. Though we are not perfect fasters by any means, our family eats more simply in the season of Advent. We decorate our tree just before Christmas and then leave it up through Theophany. We celebrate St. Nicholas' Feast Day by putting out shoes on the night of December 5th so that "St. Nicholas" can fill them with gold coins while the children sleep. We listen to Orthodox Christmas music via the internet (try Ancient Faith Radio) or CDs, and we keep an Advent wreath and calendar for six Sundays instead of four. In other words, we have adapted, albeit imperfectly, our own cultural traditions to incorporate the spirit of Orthodox worship and emphasis at this time of year.

Author Matthew Gallatin has said that we in America have traditionally celebrated the Christmas season in backwards fashion. "Just as the guest of honor walks through the door, it's all over," he notes. This year, may we embrace the Orthodox vision of holy preparation, so that when December 25th dawns, we will be ready to receive Christ in the feast, the "Winter Pascha" of Nativity!

This article first appeared on Orthodox Circle. Ginny Nieuwsma lives with her family (4 children still at home, 2 have flown the coop) in San Jose, California. She attends St. Basil the Great Greek Orthodox Church.
