The Messenger

The Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Churh
December 2012

Nativity According to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, December 25

MARK THE DATES

December 1: Choir Rehearsal, 3:30 PM
December 2: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
December 6: St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, Liturgy 8:00 AM
December 8: Russian Confessions, 9:00 AM; Slavonic Liturgy, 10:00 AM
December 11-13: Father John out of town
December 13: Eritrean Community Service, 8:00 AM
December 15: Choir Rehearsal, 3:30 PM
December 18: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM
December 19-20: Advisory Committee, Diocesan Council (Father out of town)
December 25: NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Send email addresses and corrections to: frjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

December 2012

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church • Las Vegas, Nevada

GREETERS Dec 2: Brophy/Osburn Dec 9: Harry/Britton Dec 16: McAuley/Murphy Dec 23: Campbell/Bica Dec 30: Harry/Osburn						**1** Choir Rehearsal, 3:30 pm GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 pm Confessions
2 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 am Hours: Stransky Epistle: Youth Post-Comm: Veek NO CHURCH SCHOOL ANNUAL MEETING	**3**	**4**	**5** BAPTISM, 11:00 am DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 pm ADULT FAITH FORUM	**6** DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 am St. Nicholas of Myra	**7**	**8** Russian Confessions, 9 am SLAVONIC LITURGY 10:00 am GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 pm Confessions
9 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 am Hours: Hood Epistle: Dresko Post-Comm: Harry A. CHURCH SCHOOL	**10**	**11** FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN DECEMBER 11-13 NO ADULT FAITH FORUM	**12**	**13** ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 am	**14**	**15** Choir Rehearsal, 3:30 pm GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 pm Confessions
16 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 am Hours: Sas Epistle: Norville Post-Comm: Brophy CHURCH SCHOOL	**17**	**18** Parish Council, 6:00 pm	**19** BP ADVISORY COUNCIL San Francisco FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN DECEMBER 19-20 NO ADULT FAITH FORUM	**20** DIOCESAN COUNCIL San Francisco	**21**	**22** COOKIE EXCHANGE, 3:00 pm GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 pm Confessions
23 DIVINE LITURGY, 9 am Hours: Dresko Epistle: E. Sas Post-Comm: Norville CHURCH SCHOOL	**24** Strict Fast VESPERS/ LITURGY, 8:00 am EVE OF THE NATIVITY CHRISTMAS VIGIL, 6:30 pm	**25** Fast Free DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 am NATIVITY OF THE LORD	**26** Fast Free DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 am SYNAXIS OF THE THEOTOKOS NO ADULT FAITH FORUM	**27** Fast Free Coffee Chat, 10:00 am	**28** Fast Free	**29** Fast Free BAPTISM, 3:30 pm Crothers GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 pm Confessions
30 DIVINE LITURGY, 9 am Hours: Hood Epistle: Stransky Post-Comm: C. Sas NO CHURCH SCHOOL	**31**					

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Thoughts on Communion and Confession

An Orthodox acquaintance from the Air Force chaplaincy wrote these words to me when he retired to go back to parish ministry:

"My good ol' hunky parish entirely comes to the Chalice — and, of course, seldom comes to Confession — although most come to vespers. It is interesting to see that the teaching of frequent Communion found a ready audience. On the other hand, the acceptance of a complete spiritual life is still not understood, simply a change from no Communion to frequent communion. On the whole, I still would say the frequent Communion is preferable but we are shifting from one end of the gauge to another with no stop at reasonable, sincere understanding."

That made me think — how do we approach Confession and Communion when the vast majority of our faithful fall into neither hot nor cold categories? Why is it so hard to jumpstart a soul from lukewarm and indifferent to ablaze with fire and love for the Lord? How are we preparing ourselves during this time of prayer, fasting and repentance to create a place in the depths of our souls worthy of receiving the new-born King?

How to inspire a flock to confess sins and prepare for Holy Communion in a serious way is, obviously, a question with which every pastor struggles. Here at St. Paul's I struggle with it just like I struggled with it in other places. I think that in many, many cases (the vast majority), people years ago went to Communion once a year because "that's what Father taught us to do." Now, people come to the chalice regularly because "that's what Father taught us to do." Baaa.....

But I have noticed some things over the years about this issue:

It is amazing how many of our priests have the audacity to consider themselves "spiritual elders." I hear priests speak all the time about how they direct the lives of their penitents, how they expect a certain level of understanding, how they demand confession at certain intervals. Many priests seem to consider themselves "gurus."

At the same time, I have met maybe three or four priests in my lifetime that I believe have the qualities to be spiritual elders. I won't embarrass the living ones, but Fr. Alexander Schmemann was one. As I don't consider myself to belong to that august group, I have come to realize that the value of someone confessing their sins to me has only two real values. First, to confess our sins to a priest is simply a good thing. Second, the relationship that I build with each and every one of my flock allows for a moment or two of real revelation and help to come through the Spirit in a confession. It has *something* to do with me, but not *everything*.

Pastors sometimes forget that we can't order, demand or nag our parishioners into heaven. We must constantly preach the positives of what is expected of them (us!) instead of the negative blasting away at what "they" aren't doing. I encourage each and every one of you, my flock, to come to confession as often as possible. And that is a good thing. But I

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Natalia Minkoff

Church School/Youth
Amy McAuley
Christina Sas

certainly don't and won't preach a sermon about how the congregation is going to hell in a handbasket because they don't come to confession enough. I might, however, preach a sermon about the necessity and value of a good confession. Is a forced confession that begins "because you told me I had to come, Father..." any better than no confession?

Same thing for Vespers. Everyone in the parish should come to Vespers. Can I "force" someone to come to Vespers? Probably - at least I can withhold the sacraments if they don't come. So then they don't come to Vespers AND don't come to the chalice. Great "victory." God and the Church sent me here to be a father to my children, not a parole officer. Every individual that comes through the doors of our church also has a responsibility for their soul and the decisions he or she makes regarding their soul and their behaviors. I am not here to win battles — I am here to exhort and preach and teach everyone to live a better Christian life.

What is "enough"? What is a "complete" spiritual life? Do each of us priests have it? Over 30+ years I've had people that desired confession virtually weekly — and it was, spiritually speaking, a waste of time — even a delusion. Many of those people were simply using me as a therapist and a crutch. They couldn't deal with their (name it - sexual problems, alcoholism, marital problems, dishonesty at work, etc., etc.) and couldn't afford a real therapist, so they came to me to absolve their consciences (not their sins).

At the same time, I have had those who come to confession once or twice a year who shame me by the depth of their confessions - they take it seriously and prepare themselves very well. Who is better? Which will be judged on a harder "curve"?

I find it very difficult to demand spirituality of my flock that is very difficult for me. I struggle with my own confession - never feeling well prepared, sometimes just "fitting it in" to my schedule, going "because it's Lent." I feel my spiritual father should just shake his finger at me and ask me when I am going to get serious about my spiritual life. If I struggle almost daily with prayer, fasting and the Christian life, how can I beat up my parishioners about the same things? I am haunted daily by the passage from Matthew read at Holy Tuesday Matins ("Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites...").

All of us should read and reflect on the General Confession that was used regularly by St. John of Kronstadt. It is a meditation on the daily struggles that each of us has living the spiritual life. At the same time, it is a very practical list of sins and failings that can inspire all of us to look at our own interior lives in a deeper way. It is also a way to motivate ourselves into thinking about our sins, leading us to desire a more frequent and fruitful confession of our sins.

Without implying to **anyone** that we should not confess our sins, the bottom line to me about Confession and frequent Communion is this: I would rather trust in the mercy, kindness and forgiveness of God for those who might approach the chalice with

less than total preparation (when it is hard to measure just *what* total preparation is) than offend Him by simply not approaching at all. It is better to eat and have a chance to live, than abstain and surely starve to death.

Every single person, beginning with myself, should come to Vespers, pray, fast, and confess our sins in preparation for the reception of Holy Communion. While all have to be regular, the frequency of confession has to be prayed about and discussed about with Father, but **never** neglected. Don't neglect this most important aspect of our Faith.

Father John

Feastdays

Please join us for the festal celebrations during December.

St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra
December 6
Divine Liturgy, 8:00 AM (THUR)

Eve of the Nativity of our Lord
December 24
Vespers/Liturgy, 8:00 AM (MON)

CHRISTMAS DAY
Nativity of our Lord
December 25
Vigil Service, 6:30 PM (MON)
Divine Liturgy, **9:00 AM** (TUES)

Synaxis of the Theotokos
December 26
Divine Liturgy, 8:00 AM (WED)

Dome Project Complete!

Our icon installation of the Pantocrator in the dome of our church is now complete and blessed! We thank everyone who helped out in this very big undertaking. We need to replenish our Icon Fund before the next phase can be undertaken. **If you could make a directed donation to the Icon Fund, it would be most appreciated!**

Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast in preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord continues until our celebration of the Lord's Nativity on December 25th. **All regular communicants should come to the Sacrament of Confession during the Fast.** Father is available after Vespers and by appointment.

Annual Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting will take place on Sunday, December 2nd, following the Divine Liturgy. All voting members of the parish are asked to remain after liturgy for the meeting. A voting member must:

a) be a Baptized and Chrismated Orthodox Christian, and

b) be at least 18 years of age, and

c) regularly, but at least once a year, partake of the Sacraments of Private Confession and Communion in the Parish, and

d) have been a member of the Parish for a prior consecutive twelve (12) month period, and

e) have a current (within the calendar year) signed Pledge Form on file with the church office, making a financial commitment to the parish.

If you have questions about your voting membership, please see Father John!

Slavonic Liturgy

The monthly Slavonic Liturgy will be served on the second Saturday of the month, December 8th, as usual. Fr. Alexander will be hearing Russian language confessions at 9:00 AM. The liturgy is scheduled to begin at 10:00 AM.

YOUTH RETREAT POSTPONED

We planned on having an Advent Retreat for teens and young adults focusing on the recent phenomenon of *The Hunger Games.* The date originally chosen, December 8th, is not viable because of our Slavonic Liturgy. The retreat will be scheduled for sometime after Christmas, date to be announced. It willl be a one-day retreat with prayer, service and discussion ending with Vespers. Mark the date!

FATHER AWAY

Father John will be away briefly twice during December. He will be gone December 11-13, getting to meet his newest grandson! He also will be in San Francisco, December 19-20, for the meetings of the Bishop's Advisory Committee and the Diocesan Council. He will check email and voice mail during his absence.

Cookie Exchange Fundraiser

Tired of baking for weeks on end during the holiday season? Save some time and energy and exchange cookies with your friends and family!! Bring one type of cookie and go home with all the cookies you can imagine! Share your favorite recipes and family traditions all while supporting our church. Invite your friends and tell your co-workers!! The more the Merrier!!

You **MUST RSVP** to Juliana with type of cookie being made. **No duplicates allowed** (at the discretion of the hostess) so first come first choice of cookie!

Try to bring family traditions to share.

Cookie Exchange Rules: All cookies should be homemade. NO STORE BOUGHT. NO PRE-PACKAGED. Fudge is an exception if home made. Please bring 4-5 dozen total cookies.

If you can not bake, or simply do not have the time you may bring 4-5 dozen from a REAL BAKERY. The theme is "Christmas Cookie"

Arrange cookies in a basket, tupperware or platter for display. You will be given a container for choosing the cookies you wish to take home with you. $10 per container, fit what you can. ***All proceeds go directly to St. Pauls.*** Free will donations also accepted.

The Cookie Exchange will be held on Saturday, December 22, beginning at 3:00 PM, followed by Vespers.

2013 Stewardship Drive

We ask for your support of the parish operating budget in the next calendar year. Pledge Forms have been available for you to fill out and make a prayerful and thoughtful gift to God and His Church. **Please return your form to Treasurer Karen Short or Father John by December 2nd to ensure confidentialty of oyur pledge.** *As a reminder, to be a voting member of our parish you must have a signed Pledge Form on file at the office in addition to your sacramental participation in Confession and Communion at St. Paul's.*

Coffee/Cleaning Schedules

The weekly coffee hour and cleaning schedules are no longer going to be printed in the monthly newsletter or calendar. A number of last-minute changes happen in both schedules which makes the monthly newsletter inaccurate and misleading. The weekly bulletin will still have the schedules and they are posted in the church hall.

House Blessings

We are fast approaching house blessing season after the Feast of the Theophany of our Lord on January 6th. A sign-up list will be available in the church vestibule for those who wish to have Father come and bless their house. Please note morning, afternoon or evening as your preferred time and, as usual, note if you wish a special visit for dinner, etc. Father will then coordinate the schedule after seeing who signs up.

Feeding the Homeless

Our next Feeding the Homeless project date is Saturday, January 19th. We gather at 10:30 AM to prepare bag lunches then go down to distribute them to the needy. Join us! If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches, it would be appreciated. **We also have a need for basic toiletries: toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, etc.** If you have any *travel* size items, leave them in the bin in the church vestibule. Thank you!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- Our schedule for the **weekly** clean-up of the church needs volunteers. The duty is easy, takes two hours at the most, and you can do it at your convenience as Father will provide a key and entry instructions. Also needed:
- **Coffee Hour** volunteers are needed.
- **Bell-ringer** volunteers are needed.
- **Greeters** are needed.

Please offer some time and telent to the Lord in the care of His Church. Sign-up lists are available in the church.

Adult Classes

We continue the series of Wednesday evening talks in our Adult Faith Forum: *Theology in Color: Iconography of the Orthodox Church.* We have daily vespers at 6:30 PM, followed by a one-hour discussion. Please join us!

Coffee Chat

We meet on Thursdays, at 10:00 AM at El Rancho on Pecos and Russell unless otherwise announced. Everyone is invited.

Parents Notice

All strollers are to be kept on the front of the north side of the church to allow free flow of the traffic. Not only will this help with crowd movement, it is safer for you, your child and those around you. Thank you!

Please note that the room on the north side of the vestibule formerly used as a "cry room" will be unavailable for use during services. If you need a time out for your child or a diaper change, please go to one of the restrooms or for a short walk in the courtyard.

Prayer for our Parish

We ask everyone to remember our parish in daily prayer:

Lord, God and Savior of all, we thank You for the blessing of St. Paul parish in our lives. May Your word become alive in each and

every one of us who strive to follow You. Please bless and multiply all the gifts — time, talent and treasure — which are given in thanks to benefit our mission and glorify Your name. Bless and multiply the givers and help us all to make present Your Kingdom. For You are the Giver of all that is good, O Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Charity

Our normal collections of food for Friends of the Desert continue. *Special needs at this time: jelly, jam, peanut butter, canned fruit, canned tuna/chicken.* Thank you!

Sacraments/Special Services

Please follow these guidelines.

• ***Baptisms.*** A date and time must be requested at least three weeks in advance. In addition, a personal meeting scheduled with Fr. John will be necessary.

• ***Matrimony.*** A date and time for weddings must be requested at least six months (preferably twelve) in advance. There will be premarital sessions for both bride and groom to attend.

•***Memorials (Panikhida).*** Requests for a memorial must be made at least one week in advance. If possible, the service should not be served on Sunday, the Day of the Resurrection, when all departed have already been remembered in the Liturgy.

Parish Council Synopsis November 20, 2012 Meeting

Rector's Report:
Father noted that he will be absent from the parish for two brief out of town trips, December 11-13 and December 19-20.

He also commented on how pleased he was with the All-American Council, which turned out to be quite inspiring and fruitful.

Vice President: Laura reported that she had already given Vladimir Krassovsky a check for the iconography.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short distributed reports to council members earlier via e-mail. We are still three months behind in assessments. Income for October was: $15,069.10, and expenses of $17,477.34 for a deficit of $2,408.24.

YTD 10/31/12	
2012 YTD Inc	$ 189,488.11
2012 YTD Exp	$ 180,231.05
Inc over Exp	$ 9,257.06

Buildings and Grounds:

- Harry was unable to contact people for the roof. Laura has a contact and will work with Harry to get the roof inspected.
- The damage to the shrine and the corner stucco on the church that have extensive water damage have been patched. Painting will be done.
- There is no working vacuum at the church. Harry took one and will repair it. Father recommended purchasing another new one. Council agreed.
- Kevin McAuley has access to a lift when we are ready to install the lighting for the dome. The scaffolding can come down without regard to the lighting work.
- A number of toilet problems have been repaired. The windows in the dome need caulking before the scaffold comes down.
- Harry reminded us that we need to talk about capital projects at the annual meeting: the roof, replacement of the HVAC units and the parking lot. All these projects should be done outside of the operating budget.

Church School/Youth:
The youth retreat planned for December 8, as Father did not remember the conflict that day with the Slavonic Liturgy. The retreat will be rescheduled for sometime after Christmas.

Charity:
The Feeding the Homeless project went extremely well. We prepared and distributed more bag lunches than any other time. In addition, much clothing was also distributed. The whole project cost about $144. There is a real need for socks — preferably white. The next project will be scheduled for January 19. Status quo for everything else.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: The next Eritrean service will be held on december 13. It remains to be seen when the weekly schedule will begin.

O*utreach/Website:* Status quo.

Russian:
The Russian community did not collect enough in November to cover Fr. Alexander's expenses. They gave him $100 and the agreement from the beginning was that he needed $500 to cover expenses. Father John spoke with Fr. Alexander and he is coming in

December. If the Russian community cannot cover his costs, we will reassess and perhaps cancel the monthly visits.

Masha Pisarenko has returned from Russia and would like to help coordinate with the Russian community along with Natalia Minkoff.

Stewardship:
As of this meeting, 24 pledges have been returned. The pledges are supposed to be in by december. So far, the returned pledges are generous.

OLD BUSINESS

Bell Tower: no report.

Winter Fundraiser: Since the wine tasting/cook off idea has not come to fruition, Juliana Veek proposed a Cookie Exchange for the Christmas holiday, on December 22nd. Council thought this was a good idea.

Iconography Project: The icon is installed and finishing touch-up work is going to be done by Saturday. On Monday, the final coat of shellac will be applied and then the scaffolding will be deconstructed starting on Tuesday, November 27th. Father will bless the icon on Sunday, November 25th.

25th Anniversary: Everything is in place. In january, we will begin work on the ad book and will ask everyone to solicit ads from their local merchants. This book will be the only fundraiser part of the celebration. The meal tickets will be only what our costs are.

NEW BUSINESS

Annual Meeting:
Our annual parish meeting will be held on Sunday, December 2, 2012.

Nominating Committee: Alan Buttell has agreed to accept another nomination for a term. Kevin McAuley has agreed to accept nomination. The third and final slot will be filled after Father approaches the candidate. All council members were reminded by Father that they need to come for Confession before installation.

Budget Committee: Father presented the proposed 2013 Operating Budget that he, Karen and Laura worked on. It is a balanced budget of $221,746, only a $1,000 increase from the 2012 budget. The budget as presented has been streamlined, budgeting the same amount of money, but drastically reducing categories to simplify counting and bookkeeping.

Council moved, seconded and unanimously agreed to present the proposed 2013 Operating Budget to the annual meeting as is.

Anyone wanting a written report to be prepared before the annual meeting needs to have it to Fr. John by November 25.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 18, 2012, after Vespers.

PARISH DIPTYCHS

This list of parish departed is to remind us all of those whom we love and miss and to spur us to remember them in our daily prayers. They will be remembered in the proskomedia before each liturgy.

MONTH OF DECEMBER

Tiblets Araia
December 12, 2003

Mila Popovich
December 13, 1997

John Kort
December 13, 1998

Olga Neitzke
December 13, 2003

Gennady Skobelev
December 13, 2006

James Makovlev
December 20, 1999

Alexandra Otterness
December 22, 1996

Andrijana Djokic
December 26, 2002

Alexander Sabanov
December 27, 2005

ST. ATHANASIUS
On the Incarnation

Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so it is with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.