

THE MESSENGER

The Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church
DECEMBER 2014



CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

MARK THE DATES

December 6: Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM, ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA
CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK, 10:00 AM-1:00 PM
Choir Rehearsal after Vespers

December 13: Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM, ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA

December 14: Reception of Lessin and Huffman Families, 9:00 AM
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING FOLLOWS LITURGY

December 16-17: Father John out of town (Diocesan Council, San Francisco)

December 24: Vespers/Liturgy, 9:00 AM; Nativity Vigil, 6:30 PM

December 25: Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM; NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

December 26: Divine Liturgy, 8:00 AM; Synaxis of the Theotokos

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

December 2014

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

	1	2	3	4	5	6
			ADULT FAITH FORUM (CLASS ONLY), 7:00 PM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM		DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM ST. NICHOLAS COOKIE WALK, 10-1 GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL
7 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: YOUTH EPISTLE: YOUTH POST-COMM: YOUTH CHURCH SCHOOL	8	9	10	11	12	13
			DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM		DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BAPTISM, 11:00 AM GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
14 RECEPTION OF LESSIN FAMILY DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: STRANSKY EPISTLE: BROOKS POST-COMM: HOOD ANNUAL MEETING	15	16	17	18	19	20
		DIOCESAN COUNCIL (FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN)		ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM		CHURCH CLEAN-UP, 10:00 AM GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
21 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: HOOD EPISTLE: DEMKO POST-COMM: WHEELER CHURCH SCHOOL	22	23	24	25	26	27
		BAPTISM, 4:00 PM	VESPERS/LITURGY, 9:00 AM EVE OF NATIVITY NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:30 PM	DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM NATIVITY OF OUR LORD		GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
28 DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: BROOKS EPISTLE: HOOD POST-COMM: PARKER NO CHURCH SCHOOL	29	30	31	Jan 1		
			NO ADULT FAITH FORUM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD	GREETERS DECEMBER 7: OSBURN/MURPHY DECEMBER 14: CAMPBELL/WHEELER DECEMBER 21: MCAULEY/JOHNSON DECEMBER 28: MASON/CONDUCTOR	



The Messenger

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DECEMBER 2014

Why Do We Fast for Christmas?

by Father Stephen Freeman

Fasting is not very alive or well in the Christian world. Much of that world has long lost any living connection with the historical memory of Christian fasting. Without the guidance of Tradition, many modern Christians either do not fast, or constantly seek to re-invent the practice, sometimes with unintended consequences.

There are other segments of Christendom who have tiny remnants of the traditional Christian fast, but in the face of a modern world have reduced the tradition to relatively trivial acts of self-denial.

I read recently (though I cannot remember where) that the rejection of Hesychasm was the source of all heresy. In less technical terms we can say that knowing God in truth, participating in His life, union with Him through humility, prayer, love of enemy and repentance before all and for everything, is the purpose of the Christian life. Hesychasm (Greek Hesychia=Silence) is the name applied to the Orthodox

tradition of ceaseless prayer and inner stillness. But ceaseless prayer and inner stillness are incorrectly understood if they are separated from knowledge of God and participation in His life, union with Him through humility, prayer, love of enemy and repentance before all and for everything.

And it is this same path of inner knowledge of God (with all its components) that is the proper context of fasting. If we fast but do not forgive our enemies – our fasting is of no use. If we fast and do not find it drawing us into humility – our fasting is of no use. If our fasting does not make us yet more keenly aware of the fact that we are sinful before all and responsible to all then it is of no benefit. If our fasting does not unite us with the life of God – which is meek and lowly – then it is again of no benefit.

Fasting is not dieting. Fasting is not about keeping a Christian version of kosher. Fasting is about hunger and humility (which is increased as we allow ourselves to become weak). Fasting is about allowing our heart to

break.

I have seen greater good accomplished in souls through their failure in the fasting season than in the souls of those who “fasted well.” Publicans enter the kingdom of God before Pharisees pretty much every time.

Why do we fast? Perhaps the more germane question is “why do we eat?” Christ quoted Scripture to the evil one and said, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” We eat as though our life depended on it and it does not. We fast because our life depends on the word of God.

I worked for a couple of years as a hospice chaplain. During that time, daily sitting at the side of the beds of dying patients – I learned a little about how we die. It is a medical fact that many people become “anorexic” before death – that is – they cease to want food. Many times family and even doctors become concerned and force food on a patient who will not survive. Interestingly, it was found that patients who became anorexic had less pain than

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Alan Buttell
Kevin McAuley
Litsa Osburn
Joseph Wheeler

SUB-COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds
Kevin McAuley

Eritrean & Ethiopian Outreach
Genet Bokre

Russian Outreach
Natalia Minkoff

Church School/Youth
Amy McAuley
Christina Sas

Fellowship Committee

those who, having become anorexic, were forced to take food. (None of this is about the psychological anorexia that afflicts many of our youth. That is a tragedy)

It is as though at death our bodies have a wisdom we have lacked for most of our lives. It knows that what it needs is not food – but something deeper. The soul seeks and hungers for the living God. The body and its pain become a distraction. And thus in God's mercy the distraction is reduced.

Christianity as a religion – as a theoretical system of explanations regarding heaven and hell, reward and punishment – is simply Christianity that has been distorted from its true form. Either we know the living God or we have nothing. Either we eat His flesh and drink His blood or we have no life in us. The rejection of Hesychasm is the source of all heresy.

Why do we fast? We fast so that we may live like a dying man – and that in dying we can be born to eternal life.

<http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glorry2godforallthings/2011/11/12/the-nativity-fast-why-we-fast-2/>

FEASTDAYS

During December, we celebrate the following feastdays. Please join us!

St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
December 6
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)

St. Herman of Alaska
December 13
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)

EVE OF THE NATIVITY
December 24

VESPERS/LITURGY, 9:00 AM
NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:30 PM (WED)

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD
December 25
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (THUR)

Synaxis of the Theotokos
December 26
DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (FRI)

NATIVITY FAST

The Nativity Fast in preparation for the Incarnation of our Lord continues through the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of the Feast on December 25.

During the Fast, everyone who is communing regularly should make the effort to reflect on their spiritual lives and come to the Sacrament of Confession before Christmas. Father hears confessions after Vespers on Saturday evenings and by appointment. **He does not mind making appointments (and there is no waiting in line!).**

VOICES OF THE MARTYRS

We are collecting winter clothes and items which will be sent to Syrian refugee camps to be distributed by local Christians. **Only** these items will be sent, **nothing else:** knit hat, gloves, mittens, socks, sweater, solid color T-shirt, jacket or windbreaker, blanket, sheet, towel, bar of soap, foam or sponge ball. **No pictures or words on the clothes, no notes, literature, names or contact information.** For more information see the brochure. Leave donations in the plastic bin at the table in the vestibule, where the Voice of the Martyrs poster and brochures are located —look at the poster to see what a difference we will be making.

PLEDGE FORMS DUE

It is time to make a pledge for 2015. Pledge Forms have been distributed and all are asked to prayerfully and soberly make a pledge of time, talent and treasure to support the work of our parish next year. A scripturally based financial pledge is a proportionate (percentage) pledge, tithing (10% of your income) if possible. Forms are now due back to Fr. John or Karen Short. All pledges and personal information are confidential and never shared.

CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK

The cookie walk will be held on Saturday, December 6, St. Nicholas Day, from 10-1 following the liturgy. To volunteer or for more information, please contact Tanya Riley at 775-513-9457 or email her at tanyariley7403@yahoo.com. We want to build on the success from last year's first cookie walk. Please help!

CHOIR REHEARSAL

Choir rehearsals will be held following Vespers on December 6th. All choir members are asked to make every effort to be present.

SLAVONIC SERVICE

Father Alexander will **not** be here for the regular monthly services in December. He will be here on January 3rd, when the Russian community will celebrate a Yolka at 10:00 AM, beginning with a Moleben.

PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Our annual meeting will take place on Sunday, December 14. If you are interested in serving on the parish council (there is one opening), please see Fr. John,

Litsa Osburn, or Ginny Hood. We meet on the third Tuesday of each month and you must be willing to not only meet, but act as a spiritual leader in the parish as well as willing to assume duties assigned by the council.

To serve on the parish council, you must meet the following qualifications (**the same qualifications to be a voting member of the parish**):

1) Have been a parish member for at least the past 12 months;

2) Have regularly, but at least once in the past year, been to the Sacraments of Confession and Communion in our parish;

3) Have a signed pledge form on file with the office.

In addition, please note that our By-Laws prohibit two people from the same household serving on the council simultaneously (i.e., if your spouse is on the council, you are ineligible).

DIOCESAN COUNCIL

Father John will be in San Francisco December 16-17, for the Bishop's Advisory Committee and Diocesan Council meetings.

CHURCH CLEAN-UP

We will have a general clean-up of the church and grounds in anticipation of our celebration of the Nativity of our Lord. **We will begin at 10:00 AM on Saturday, December 20.** Please join us — the more hands we have, the better and the quicker the job!

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project date is **Saturday, January 24th**. 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 (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

ADULT FAITH FORUM

The Adult Faith Forum continues with discussion/bible study about the Orthodox teachings on contemporary issues. We are focusing right now on the Sermon on the Mount. Once again, we will have Wednesday evening Daily Vespers at 6:30 PM, followed by class.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

We have established a goal of **\$60,000** to fund needed projects to maintain and repair our aging infrastructure. We ask everyone to consider a special donation to this fund, above and beyond your normal contributions for the support of the parish.

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!

ORTHODOX VENDORS

We have established a list of businesses that our parish uses or are owned and operated by Orthodox Christians (some parishioners). We provide this information for you to consider if you need services.

Amco Plumbing
Howard Powell
(702) 839-1286

CB Air Conditioning
Cedomir Blagojevic
(702) 493-0295

Dolphin Court Salon & Day Spa

7581 W. Lake Mead Blvd.
(702) 946-6000

Nina Grozav, Realtor
bnv7777@gmail.com
(702) 521-0208
speaks Russian and Romanian

Kyklos Café (Greek food)
Galleria Mall
Sophocles Frangakis
(702) 450-1515

XpressPro (auto repair)
3190 E. Sunset Rd.
Bruce & Svetlana Balasky
(702) 815-0444

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.

SACRAMENTS/SPECIAL SERVICES

Please follow these guidelines.

• **Baptisms.** A personal meeting scheduled with Fr. John will be necessary to schedule any baptism requested.

• **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 be served on Saturday. Other requests will be met as pastorally possible.

PARISH COUNCIL SYNOPSIS NOVEMBER 18, 2014 MEETING

Rector's Report:

Reminded council he will be away for Thanksgiving holiday week in Connecticut with family but will return for weekend services.

Reported that the clergy retreat he attended in Dunlap, CA Nov 10-12 was a rewarding experience of what the Church should be. The retreat was attended by three bishops and clergy from multiple Orthodox jurisdictions; including Greeks, Serbians, Antiochians, and OCA. It was gratifying to observe all participating in the same Liturgy.

Informed council that there will be a number of receptions into the church in December from the 12 enrolled catechumens. Fr. John is pleased by the motivation and enthusiasm shown by this group of catechumens.

Vice President: Ginny Hood informed council she likes the idea of collecting survival items for displaced Syrian refugees that Rae Pattison is planning this Nativity Fast season through the Voice of the Martyrs organization. She related how her church school class came to realize the importance of proportional giving as illustrated by a practical

example.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short reported on our financials.

Capital Fund: \$1,569.33

Rainy Day: \$8,756.61

Icon Fund: \$7,050.84

Income for October was \$15,696.66, with expenses of \$18,804.26 for a **deficit of \$3,107.60.**

YTD 2014 (Jan-Oct)

2014 Inc \$ 198,627.24

2014 Exp \$ 181,547.14

Inc over Exp \$ 17,080.10

Karen reports all parish finances including accounts payable are totally current.

Audit of parish finances was completed Sunday, November 16 with a written preliminary report. There were no discrepancies. The auditors made a recommendation that the parish should maintain a more formal filing system for bids reviewed or contracted by the parish.

Karen recommended to council that the parish is financially able and should now apply for its own Sam's Club membership/credit instead of relying on the Campbell family's Orthodox Life Givings Foundation. The current membership renews in April, however Pamela Campbell and Karen Short will effect the transfer in January 2015. There are a couple of parishioners who still possess Sam's Club cards through Orthodox Life Givings and who are not actively involved in church purchasing. They will be requested to surrender their cards or pay for their own personal Sam's membership. Karen plans to review each December the list of people who possess parish Sam's Club cards and keep

it restricted to those who are actively purchasing for the parish.

Father reports the iconographer is coming in December to discuss future icon work. This may include the altar area and the pillars. The restricted fund is available for this project.

Fr. John also raised the question about the possibility of refinancing the mortgage at the current low interest rates to have a fixed rather than adjustable rate mortgage. Also discussed was the possibility of eliminating the current guarantor of the mortgage, since this was done 25 years ago on the initial mortgage and carried over when the mortgage was refinanced in 2007, and the individual is not now involved with the parish. Fr. John and Karen Short will pursue these matters.

Buildings and Grounds:

Kevin reports bell tower – status quo. Cleanup date for brush and tumbleweeds on back property still needs to be scheduled. Fr. John and Kevin will decide when.

LDI landscaping contract is up as of October 31st. No new contract at present. No payment for November and no bill received yet for December. There is no option to pay month to month until spring 2015; winter rates are \$220/month on contract. LDI is aware we are open for bids.

No official estimate received from Private Greens. (During the meeting Alan Buttell phoned Russ Griffin of Private Greens; received answer that they would look at the property next day and give an estimate.) If Private Greens is too high, then we would negotiate new contract with LDI.

Fr. John noted that the par-

ish hall and kitchen floors need to be polished again. Kevin will arrange.

Charity: Feeding the Homeless accomplished Saturday November 15. 150 lunch packages, and 100 pairs of socks were distributed. Separate donations included \$100 plus \$20 for socks from two donors, and a \$20 donation for food purchase from another donor. Total lunch package expenditure was \$100.78 at \$0.67 per bag. There is \$121.09 remaining in the account.

Next feeding of the homeless will tentatively be held, January 24 at 10:30 AM. Chronic lack of volunteers may jeopardize the continuance of this ministry.

Joe Wheeler stated IOCC Sunday is November 23. Fr. John will give short talk on the work of IOCC. Brochures and other material will be available at coffee hour.

Church School/Youth:

Fr. John informed council that Steve Tanksley will replace Christina Sas as co-coordinator of Church School. Amy McAuley will continue in her position.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: no report.

Fellowship:

Cookie Walk planned for Saturday, December 6th after liturgy. Tanya Riley organizing. Bakers still needed. Advertising includes a banner for the church fence, flyers for neighborhood and school across the street.

Outreach/Website: no report.

Russian: No Slavonic Liturgy in December. Feast Day Liturgies will be served on St. Nicholas Day, Saturday, December 6, and

St. Herman of Alaska, Saturday, December 13.

The Russian congregation has requested to use the parish hall for a Yolka on Saturday, January 3, 2015.

Stewardship: Completed pledge forms will be due by December 1. So far 14 pledges (representing 19 adults) have been returned for a total of \$35,000. Average annual pledge is \$2500.

OLD BUSINESS

Bell Tower: status quo.

Annual Benefit Dinner: The Annual Benefit Dinner for St. Paul's parish is scheduled for February 8, 2015. Pam Campbell will be asking for higher end silent auction items and will be selling tickets and table purchases.

Calendar: The 2015 Church Wall Calendars for the parish have been ordered. Alan Buttell graciously offered to sponsor the calendars once again.

NEW BUSINESS

Annual Meeting: Sunday December 14 after Liturgy.

Items to be discussed:

- 1) Vice President Ginny Hood's term is up, she has indicated that she would run again.
- 2) Secretary – 3 year term. Cathy Wilkalis has indicated that she would run again.
- 3) One vacant three-year term. Some individuals have been approached about running.
- 4) Annual Budget: (Karen Short) Mostly minor changes. Major change is COLA on salary for Fr. John. After review of standards set by Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fr. John's salary is increased by

\$2000 per year. (This is actually half of what the BLS states is average). Fr. John's health insurance has decreased. Adjusting Father's salary will increase the housing allowance but decrease the insurance. The whole package amounts to a total increase of \$1300 annually. Moved and seconded to present the budget to the annual meeting. Council approved unanimously.

Next Meeting: Normal Parish Council meeting for December would be Tuesday, December 16th. After brief discussion council members opted to hold the December Parish Council meeting on Sunday December 14 immediately following the Annual Meeting if needed.

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

ON PACING MYSELF THROUGH ADVENT • EMILY REYNOLDS

Last weekend I, and everyone else in NW Indiana, went to Hobby Lobby. My oldest (and much craftier than me) daughter likes to make homemade Christmas gifts for family members and approximately 35 of her closest friends so we have to start the process early, lest we find ourselves up till 1:00 am Modge Podging and glitter gluing on the eve of her winter break from school.

The aisles were packed with people who had similar ideas about getting a jumpstart on holiday planning. Carts were overflowing with winter wreaths, felted snowmen and all manner of sparkly ribbon. You could smell the excitement, fake pine scent, and yes, already, just a touch of stress in the air.

Thanks to Pinterest, HGTV and Better Homes and Gardens, the message we receive loud and clear when it comes to celebrating Christmas is "go big or go home."

Wait...what's that? Are you telling me you haven't ordered Christmas cards or finished your homemade Jesse Tree and Advent Calendar? You haven't been collecting festive gluten-free cookie recipes, or stocking your gift closet with thoughtful presents for your loved ones throughout the year? You say you are already struggling to stay on top of normal everyday demands and break out into a cold sweat when you think about all that's required to create a "perfect Christmas?"

Well, welcome to my reality! Read on!

This year, my 40th year, has been my year of restraint. This year I've been learning the value of healthy boundaries and simplification. Excessive multitasking, over sharing and over comparing, and high expectation setting are all habits I've been prayerfully weeding from the proverbial garden of my soul. My access to peace is dependent on stillness and attentiveness, attributes impossible to attain, it turns out, when my mind is buzzing with too much noisy stimuli.

This advent, instead of aiming too high then burning myself out, I'm going

for small, consistent and quiet, leaning on the Church to keep my priorities straight by way of attending Her services, singing Her hymns and participating in Her sacraments. This season, instead of looking outward at how everyone else is doing Christmas, I'm striving to keep my focus fixed firmly on Jesus, approaching the manger like a lowly shepherd with nothing to offer but repentance and awe.

My family and I will snuggle up with our own unique traditions as we await the birth of Christ, traditions just right for us involving treats for neighbors, Charles Dickens's Christmas Carol, readings from Meditations for Advent, shoes filled with chocolates and candy canes from St. Nicholas, the hanging of beloved and nostalgic tree ornaments. None of these will require a lot of money or sewing skills, neither will they be featured on style or parenting blogs but I'm fine with that, really...finally.

This advent, instead of beating myself up over not doing more, I plan on decidedly choosing less – less fighting the crowds at shopping malls and box stores, less of stuffing my already full schedule with additional projects and commitments, less rushing, less pining for material possessions, less wasting my time and energy browsing the internet for cool Christmas ideas only to become overwhelmed and dissatisfied, less forgetting to be still, grateful, joyful.

Advent is such a precious gift to all of us who are tired, uber-aware of our own unworthiness, and aching for a reprieve from worldly pressures. "Come," this season of preparation calls to us, "lay aside your busyness, passions and distractions, and reflect on the Mystery of the Incarnation. Allow it to sustain you, define you, and fill you with Light, and compassion for your neighbor."

The Church's invitation to prepare for the Nativity is above all a command to us to open the gates of repentance, that Christ may enter our very being and be born anew in our hearts, and to offer our virtues to the newborn king. Instead of gold, we offer charity; instead of frankincense, prayer, instead of myrrh, repentance. Then, like the song of the angels and the adoration of the shepherds, our worship will be pure and our love without pretense. (Vassilios Papavassiliou, Meditations for Advent)