

MARCH 2017 Fasting

by Father Thomas Hopko

Jesus Himself fasted and taught His disciples to fast.

And when you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men, but your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

The purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate oneself from dependence on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of God. It is to give power to the soul so that it would not yield to temptation and sin. According to St. Seraphim, fasting is an “indispensable means” of gaining the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one’s life (cf. Conversation with Motovilov), and Jesus Himself taught that some forms of evil cannot be conquered without it (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29)

Man does not fast because it pleases God if His servants do not eat, for, as the lenten hymns of the Church remind us, “the devil also never eats.” (Lenten Triodion) Neither do men fast in order to afflict themselves with suffering and pain, for God has no pleasure in the discomfort of His people. Neither do men fast with the idea that their hunger and thirst can somehow serve as a “reparation” for their sins. Such an understanding is never given in the scriptures or the writings of the saints which claim that there is no “reparation” for man’s sin but the crucifixion of Christ. Salvation is a “free gift of God” which no “works” of man can accomplish of merit. (cf. Romans 5:15-17, Ephesians 2:8-9)

Men fast, therefore, and must fast, only to be delivered from carnal passions so that the free gift of salvation in Christ might produce great fruit in their lives. Men fast so that they might more effectively serve God who loves them and has saved them in Christ and the Spirit. Fasting without effort in virtue is wholly in vain.

Why have we fasted, and Thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and Thou takest no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast, you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and fight ... Fasting like yours ... will not make your voice to be heard on high.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness...to let the oppressed go free... is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them...

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall protect you. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; then you shall cry, and He will say: Here I am. (Isaiah 58:3-9)

MARCH 2017

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

<p>GREETERS</p> <p>MAR 5: STAFFORD/OSBURN MAR 12: CAMPBELL/DEMKO MAR 19: WHEELER/MURPHY MAR 26: CHONG/MCAULEY</p>	<p>1</p> <p>Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>2</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p> <p>COMPLINE with KANON OF ST. ANDREW, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>3</p> <p>LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM</p>	<p>4</p> <p>CHRISMATION OF AMBROSE HUFFMAN, 4:00 PM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL</p>		
<p>5</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: YOUTH EPISTLE: YOUTH POST-COMM: YOUTH CHURCH SCHOOL</p> <p>ORTHODOXY VESPERS, 5:00 PM, ST. JOHN'S</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>7</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>9</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>10</p> <p>LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM</p>	<p>11</p> <p>RUSSIAN CONFESSIONS 9 AM SLAVONIC LITURGY, 10:00 AM</p> <p>BAPTISM OF KIMBEL HALLIDAY, 3:30 PM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>12</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: H. DEMKO EPISTLE: BROOKS POST-COMM: W. DEMKO CHURCH SCHOOL</p> <p>LENTEN VESPERS, 5:00 PM, ST. GEORGE/DMITRI</p>	<p>13</p> <p>BISHOP'S ADVISORY COUNCIL DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING San Francisco, CA (Father John Gone)</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>15</p> <p>Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>16</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>17</p> <p>LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM</p> <p>LENTEN TEEN RETREAT, ST. JOHN'S</p>	<p>18</p> <p>LENTEN TEEN RETREAT</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL</p>
<p>19</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: HOOD EPISTLE: JARLSON POST-COMM: WHEELER CHURCH SCHOOL</p> <p>LENTEN VESPERS, 5:00 PM, ST. SIMEON'S</p>	<p>20</p>	<p>21</p> <p>PARISH COUNCIL, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>23</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>24</p> <p>LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM</p>	<p>25</p> <p>ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>26</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: HUFFMAN EPISTLE: STRANSKY POST-COMM: BITSKO CHURCH SCHOOL</p> <p>LENTEN VESPERS, 5:00 PM, ST. PAUL'S</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p> <p>Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>30</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>31</p> <p>ST. INNOCENT OF ALASKA LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM</p>	<p>Apr 1</p> <p>LENTEN RETREAT, BISHOP ILYA KATRE ST. JOHN'S, 9:00-3:30</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

PO Box 12635
5400 Annie Oakley Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89112-0635
702.898.4800
www.lasvegasorthodox.com

RECTOR

Archpriest John J. Dresko
1747 Crystal Downs Ave
Las Vegas, NV 89123
860.833.4921 (Mobile)
fatherjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

Father Stephen Osburn, Jr.
(702) 521-6988

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Matushka Elizabeth Dresko
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Jarrod Huffman

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...in fasting one must not only obey the rule against gluttony in regard to food, but refrain from every sin so that, while fasting, the tongue may also fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, degrading one's brother, anger and every sin committed by the tongue. One should also fast with the eyes, that is, not look at vain things... not look shamefully or fearlessly at anyone. The hands and feet should also be kept from every evil action.

When one fasts through vanity or thinking that he is achieving something especially virtuous, he fasts foolishly and soon begins to criticize others and to consider himself something great.

A man who fasts wisely...wins purity and comes to humility...and proves himself a skillful builder. (St. Abba Dorotheus, 7th c., Directions on Spiritual Training)

Saint Paul himself fasted, and in his teaching on food insists that men fast and do so in secret, without mutual inspection and judgment.

Brethren, join in imitating me, and

mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:17-19)

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything. Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food - and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (I Corinthians 6:12-13)

Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains, pass judgment on him who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?

He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord

AT A GLANCE...

Feb 27-Mar 4: First Week of Great Lent (see Calendar of Services)

Mar 4: CHRISMATION OF AMBROSE HUFFMAN, 4:00 PM

Choir Rehearsal following Vespers

Mar 11: Russian Confessions, 9:00 AM; Slavonic Liturgy, 10:00 AM

BAPTISM OF KIMBEL HALLIDAY, 3:30 PM

Mar 13-14: Father John out of town (Diocesan Council Meeting)

Mar 17-18: LENTEN TEEN RETREAT, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

Mar 18: Choir Rehearsal following Vespers

Mar 21: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM

Mar 25: ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD; Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM

Mar 26: St. Paul's Local Lenten Vespers, 5:00 PM

Apr 1: LENTEN RETREAT, St. John's Church, 9:00-3:30

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

and gives thanks to God.

Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of him for whom Christ has died ... for the Kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God – the faith that you have keep between yourself and God... whatever does not proceed from faith (whether eating or abstaining) is sin. (cf Romans 14)

The spiritual fathers, as strictly ascetic as they were, are very clear in their teaching about fasting. They insist with the Lord and the scriptures that men must fast in order to be free from passions and lust. But they insist as well that the most critical thing is to be free from all sin, including the pride, vanity and hypocrisy which comes through foolish and sinful fasting.

...eating beyond the point of being satisfied is the door of madness through which lust enters, for the belly is the queen of passions which man serves as a slave.

But you, firm in this knowledge, choose what is best for you, according to your own powers...for the perfect person, according to Saint Paul ought both “to be full and be hungry...and do all things through Christ who strengthens (Philippians 4:12-13)

Thus a man who strives for salvation... must not allow himself to eat to fullness...but should still eat all kinds of food so that on the one hand he avoid boastful pride and on the other not show disdain for God’s creation which is most excellent...Such is the reason-

ing of those who are wise! (St. Gregory of Sinai, Instruction to Hesychasts)

St. Isaac of Syria says, “Meager food at the table of the pure cleanses the soul of those who partake from all passion...for the work of fasting and vigil is the beginning of every effort against sin and lust...almost all passionate drives decrease through fasting.”

If such is the teaching to hesychast monks, it is certainly applicable to all Christians as well. The whole essence of the matter is put simply and clearly in these two short stories from the fathers of the desert.

A certain brother brought fresh loaves of bread and invited his elders. When they had eaten much, the brother, knowing their travail of abstinence, began humbly to beg them to eat more. “For God’s sake, eat this day and be filled.” And they ate another ten. Behold how these that were true monks and sincere in abstinence did eat more than they needed, for the sake of God.

Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, called the abbot Hilarion to see him. A portion of fowl was set before them and the bishop invited the abbot to eat. The old man said, “Forgive me, Father, but since the time I took this habit I have never eaten anything that has been killed.”

And Epiphanius said to him, “And from the time I took this habit I have let no man sleep who has anything against me, and neither have I slept holding anything against anyone.”

And the old man said to him, “Forgive me, Father, for your way of life is greater than mine.” (The Sayings of the Fathers)

The Orthodox Faith, www.oca.org

FEASTDAYS

During March, in addition to lenten services, we celebrate the following feasts:

ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD

March 25

PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY, 9:00 AM (FRI)

DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)

ST. INNOCENT, APOSTLE TO AMERICA

March 31

PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY, 9:00 AM (FRI)

GREAT LENT

The Fast begins on Monday, February 27. During Great Lent, every Orthodox Christian of confessing age makes the journey to the Sacrament of Confession. Scheduled times are listed in the calendar, and **Fr. John does not mind making appointments**. Please note that **after the Eve of Palm Sunday (April 8)**, confessions will **only** be heard by appointment.

Make a concerted effort to come to as many of the lenten services as possible. Our souls are strengthened and nourished by these services. Pray, fast and give alms.

Please note we are going to try a small schedule change this year and see how it goes: the **Friday Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts will be served at 9:00 AM, instead of 8:00 AM** to see if that helps with travel, attendance, etc. We will assess it after Lent.

Fasting for the Eucharist on Wednesday evenings is as follows: for those who are physically able to do so, nothing to eat or drink during the day before Holy Communion. If you are unable to be that rigorous, you should fast from a light noontime meal, no later than 1:00 PM if possible. Please see Father John if you have unique circumstances (job, etc.).

LENTEN VESPERS

The Clark County Orthodox Clergy Association once again is scheduling

Sunday evening Vespers services in our various communities. **The time this year has been changed: all services will begin at 5:00 PM.**

Mar 5: St. John Church

Mar 12: St. George Church

Mar 19: St. Simeon Church

Mar 26: St. Paul Church

Apr 2: St. Michael Church

NEED HELP

We will be using a tractor and two dumpsters to clean the back lot of the church property. We have been ordered by the city to do this at the threat of severe fines. **Please help us on Saturday, March 4, beginning at 8:30 AM.** Look at it as one of our lenten efforts!

ENTRANCES INTO THE CHURCH

During March, we will rejoice in seeing Ambrose Huffman Chrismated at 4:00 PM before Vespers on March 4. This seals and completes the emergency baptism he had in the hospital, and completes the miraculous demonstration of God's glory and power in his healing.

On Saturday, March 11, at 3:30 PM, after more than a year in study and prayer, Kimbel Halliday will be Baptized and Chrismated into the Holy Orthodox Church. We rejoice in both fulfillments and welcome Ambrose and Kimbel into the fulness of the Church!

SLAVONIC SERVICES

Father Alexander will be here as usual on March 11 for services. Russian Confessions begin at 9:00 AM, and the Slavonic Liturgy at 10:00 AM.

TEEN RETREAT

A Lenten Teen Retreat will be held on March 17-18 for the teens of the Clark County Orthodox Churches. Let Fr. John or Fr. Stephen know if you can attend. More details to follow.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL

Father John will be in San Francisco on March 13-14 for the meetings of the Bishop's Advisory Council (Mar 13) and the Diocesan Council (Mar 14). If you have an emergency or pastoral need those two days, please contact Father Stephen.

ANNUAL LENTEN RETREAT

The annual Lenten Retreat sponsored by the Clark County Orthodox Clergy Association will be held on Saturday, April 1, at St. John Church, 9:00-3:30. Bishop Ilya (Katre) will lead us on a discussion of *When you pray, say these words*. Cost is \$15.00 payable to St. Paul Church – please register with Father John so we know how many to plan for food.

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be held on a date to be determined. We will construct the lunches and bag all of the items which we distribute at 10:30 AM. We then take them downtown and distribute them and are usually done by 1:00 PM. Please join us! If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

IOCC

Joe Wheeler has been serving as our parish liaison to International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). His schedule no longer allows him to carry out these duties. If you are interested in helping us out in this position, please talk to Joe to see what it entails and then see Father John.

PROJECT MEXICO

It's on! We are going to be sending another mission team to Project Mexico next summer to help build a house. We ask everyone for their prayers first of all, and the magnificent financial

support shown this past year.

You can help support this trip by doing your Amazon shopping using our "smile" account:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/88-0242982>

Also, a gofundme page has been set up to allow direct donations. Please consider making a donation and sharing the link!

<https://www.gofundme.com/stpaulmexicotrip>

ICONOGRAPHY

The next phase of our iconography project will be to complete the east walls of the church (to the left and right of the sanctuary). Renderings are available in the church hall and you are urged to take a look. This is a MAJOR project which will require substantial funding. The two renderings posted in the hall will cost \$36,000 each, a total of \$72,000. **We are once again accepting donations to the Icon Fund. Please consider making an offering above and beyond your normal support of the parish!**

CHARITY

Our normal collections of food for Friends of the Desert continue. Needs: jelly, jam, peanut butter, canned fruit, canned tuna/chicken. Thank you!

ORTHODOX VENDORS

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.

CB Air Conditioning
Cedomir Blagojevic
(702) 493-0295

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

Makeup and Hair Artist
Natalia Kasimtseva (Baker)
(I travel to client location)
Text or call: (702) 336-8300
View portfolio at:
www.facebook.com/NataliaKasBeauty

Taffer Computers
Website Design, Marketing,
& Computer Repair
Fr. Stephen Osburn
(702) 521-6988

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 FEBRUARY 21, 2017 MEETING

Rector's Report: Fr. John was at the Metropolitan Council meeting in New York, but left the following report: He will attend Diocesan Council March 13-14 in San Francisco.

We are trying some Lenten schedule adjustments: Friday Pre-sanctified Liturgy will be at 9:00 AM instead of 08:00 AM. Father is looking at the Holy Week schedule as it is getting a little too exhausting for both he and Matushka. Some minor changes may be made.

During Lent the Sunday evening Pan-Orthodox Vespers will start at 5:00 PM. St. Paul's hosts the Lenten Vespers on March 26.

The Pan-Orthodox Lenten Retreat will be held at St. John's on Saturday, April 1, with Bishop Ilya (Katre) as the Lenten Retreat speaker.

Associate Priest's Report: Served as substitute priest for Fr Michael in Hesperia, CA Jan 28-29. All went well. Reports doing his first solo graveside burial service on Feb 14 for a Russian lady, not of our parish.

Vice President's Report: Informed council that she will look into getting the professional cleaners who are now cleaning the hall to add cleaning the church to their services. The parishioners who have been voluntarily cleaning the church now say they are no longer able to continue due to various physical problems. We are currently paying the professional cleaners \$180 per month for every other week cleaning of the hall; adding church cleaning will increase the expense. Ideally the floors of both hall and church should be cleaned every week. Ginny will check on the cost and will talk to Al,

Liza and Mary who have been cleaning the church.

Reported the carpet in the vestibule is getting worn around the edges and has become a tripping hazard. An offer has been made by a parishioner to fund purchase of a new carpet. Greg Brooks volunteered to do some research into the appropriate carpet fabric to use in that locale, since it is high traffic and needs to withstand dirt and wax removal procedures.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short distributed our financials before the meeting:

Capital Fund: \$247.42
Rainy Day: \$11,843.00
Icon Fund: \$1,796.93

Income for January was \$32,667.64, with expenses of \$22,297.15 for a surplus of \$10,370.49.

2017 YTD FINANCIALS

2017 Inc	\$ 32,667.64
2017 Exp	\$ 22,297.15
Inc over Exp	\$ 10,370.49

Karen reported Accounts Payable is totally current. Amortization on the bond issue is done twice a year in March and September. GoldStar pays out on the bonds and short term bonds.

Karen received a proposal from a parishioner that the money received from church fund raising events be evenly split between Project Mexico and the Icon Fund. Parish Council members thought it a good idea but held it for discussion in March.

COMMITTEES

Buildings and Grounds:

Kevin emailed his report to council members due to his work related travel. Briefly summarized as:

Nothing further can be done by the Parish regarding the groundwater problem on neighbors' property.

Everything that can be done has been done. Neighbors have phone numbers to resources for additional help. Water district notes water table is high everywhere right now.

Las Vegas Fire Department notified Parish to clean up shrub and palm tree debris on property or be fined if not done by March 22. Work day has been scheduled for March 4. Joe Wheeler agreed to obtain rental dumpsters. Kevin will get tractor. Fr John will be asked to make an announcement for volunteer help in church.

Doors: Kevin will try to get the doors fixed with closers and sweeps and the last of the church doors measured on that day.

Parking Lot Wall Repairs: Complete.

Sound Panels: The final panels still need to be put up in hall.

Courtyard: Ginny Hood will discuss with Al the landscaper. A solution to the wind vortex problem in the courtyard is still unresolved and the courtyard continues to look messy. Council discussed various treatments for courtyard. A suggestion was made to construct a concrete pad in the center and build a "picnic pavilion" type cover over it for all-season outdoor dining since it seems that we have also outgrown our hall. Issue is left open for discussion and suggestions.

Charity: Next Homeless feeding is Saturday, Feb 25. Purchases of perishable food supplies are being made this week. Starting budget was \$250 from Parish in January. Current balance as of today is \$211.12.

IOCC: no report.

Church School/Youth: (Ginny Hood) Reported Lindsey Osburn's class is involved doing a project. They are fairly steady in attendance and activities as are the high school age students.

Ginny's K to 2 class is difficult to manage because it is too large, with too much developmental disparity since it also includes pre-school kids. There will be no church school held after Pascha. Fr Stephen commented his approval that the kids are being tested on their knowledge of the Creed and that all the kids are asking questions and showing interest.

Youth: There will be a teen retreat at St. John's March 17-18 conducted by Fr Matthew assisted by Fr Stephen.

Project Mexico: Fr. Stephen reported youths are taking more initiative with their own contributions and fundraising. There will be 2 fundraisers in March; See's Candy sale and a Sambusa sale. The youth will be encouraged to sell the candy outside of the parish, but any parishioners desiring candy can order it through Fr Stephen. Bea Makunen will make the sambusas. Both Lenten and non-Lenten sambusas will be available for purchase individually or by the bag.

A parishioner has offered to sponsor a scholarship for one individual, whether youth or adult. It was suggested that those desiring scholarship should participate in an essay contest. Fr Stephen will talk with Fr John about encouraging more sponsors. Other possible fundraisers involve youths cleaning and doing work around the church.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: status quo

Fellowship: no report

Outreach/website: New website will receive a couple of minor tweaks - otherwise is looking good.

Russian: status quo

Stewardship: no report

OLD BUSINESS

Greeters Training: no report.

Sunshine Group: status quo

OCL: The OCL (Orthodox Christian Laity) had an open forum in our parish hall before Vespers on Feb 11. All went well.

Archbishop Visit: Problems occurred at the potluck dinner for the Archbishop. People crowded into the hall and some started serving themselves food before the bishop arrived. There was a mob mentality and complete lack of organization. It was perceived as disrespectful to the Archbishop and embarrassing to the parish. The council decided after discussion that in future visits by the Archbishop and/or similar ranking church dignitaries, we would go back to our original serving table configuration with a single file line, and making sure the bishop is always at the head of the line and not start serving until he is present.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

Next Council Meeting:

Tuesday, March 21, 2017, 6:00 PM

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.

MONTH OF MARCH

Nicholas Janise
March 1, 1992

Gaetana Korich
March 4, 1992

Letebrhn Dintsu
March 5, 2000

Stephen Christos
March 6, 1989

Maria Kovac
March 9, 1997

Constantina Vlamis
March 10, 2000

Richard Adam Kozal
March 11, 2009

Miles Vasilyev
March 12, 2006

Kyriakos Kalfas
March 16, 1992

Ogba Chrime
March 19, 2003

Anthony Keratzedes
March 26, 1990

Barbara Ann Metropoulos
March 26, 1993

Georgina Abdoulah
March 29, 2007

Linda Ellen Katelnikoff
March 30, 1996

Amhare Habtemichael
March 31, 1998

FATHER STEPHEN'S CORNER

CONFESSION: BEHIND THE SCENES

Before I was ordained, I always wondered what it was like to be on the other side of the Confessional. My mind would often wander, thinking what must it be like or rather, what was going on in the priest's head as I was confessing my long list of sins? "This can't be fun," I'd often think to myself. "It must be super depressing to hear this." I'd think. Then every now and then, I'd wonder, "he is going to judge me differently now if I tell him this 'insert sin'" (which I also call the "YOU DID WHAT!?!" Confession.)

A year into my priesthood and countless confessions heard later, my perception is quite the opposite than I originally thought. Now I should preface by saying there are many blessings to being a priest, like having the opportunity to stand before God's altar and offer the bloodless sacrifice of His Son, but I have found that there is no greater place than standing there with someone in their most vulnerable time

of need, as they work on their relationship with God. I do not get joy out of it because I get to hear someone's darkest secrets. In fact, for me, I have found that Confession is a place where you really see God *win*. It is here where the mercy of God really is shown in action and not just words. In many ways, it reminds me just how good God actually is. It is very much a type of 'in your face' feeling.

The overwhelming power of God's love working and transforming people's hearts is one of the most inspiring and humbling experiences a priest can have.

So when I encounter someone in Confession I see a couple of things: First, I see a saint in the making. In our faith we often fall into the delusion that sainthood is mostly out of reach for the average joe. That somehow no matter how hard we work in our spiritual lives, we will never achieve that level of holiness. We will never be saints. What we often forget is all the saints of the Church are people who were recognized for their holiness because they took upon themselves the image of Christ. They served as examples after which we can all strive. The word Saint in the original Greek is "hagios"; which translates to "most holy thing". St. Paul, in his various epistles openings, offers greetings to us as saints. He does so because in Christ, Christians are made holy and become something more when they seek after Him. Repentance is a crucial piece in the fabric of our salvation. So in Confession, this makes me realize that the penitent wants to be made holy. They want to be made right. They want to be in communion with God. They want to be saints. They may not necessarily realize it in the moment, but I do.

Second, when I hear confessions I see my own weakness, my own sinfulness. There is a level of awe that takes place but there is also a level of fear. Confession is scary for the individual but it is also scary for me. I am overwhelmed by the ability of others to recognize sins in their lives that I am blind

to in mine. Hearing the person break down, humbling themselves before God when every fiber in their body tells them no, shows just how much of an examination I need to make into my own conscience effort to confess my own sins. In seminary, my father-confessor told me that priests become better confessors from hearing Confessions. He was 10,000% right.

We see Christ trusting the clergy with this living sign of mercy but also helping them realize their own sinfulness. In some ways it shows the importance of the symbiotic relationship between the laity and the clergy. In other words, we need each other in our pursuit of salvation. On the flip side, there is also a sense of fear because Christ has entrusted me, a lowly sinner, to make sure my words can offer a level of hope befitting to the confessor. While it is ultimately God who offers the grace upon the sinner, I stand there in complete awe trying to muster the appropriate words to help guide that individual, as I often say "take a 2 steps forward when they take a step back" to salvation.

You see, as I pointed to earlier, Confession is a victorious place. It is a place where Love wins. It is the moment in which the confessor and penitent's souls are revealed and yet, there is a level of mercy that God gives all of us, which we don't even deserve. Often, it reminds me of the Father opening His arms to the Prodigal Son returning when our broken lives warrant nothing but a place with the swine. Confession is such a powerful place. All I really have to do is stand there while Christ works through me to the repenting person. I am merely a spectator but also a coach allowing the great sport of God's Kingdom and Communion play out. What isn't more amazing than that?