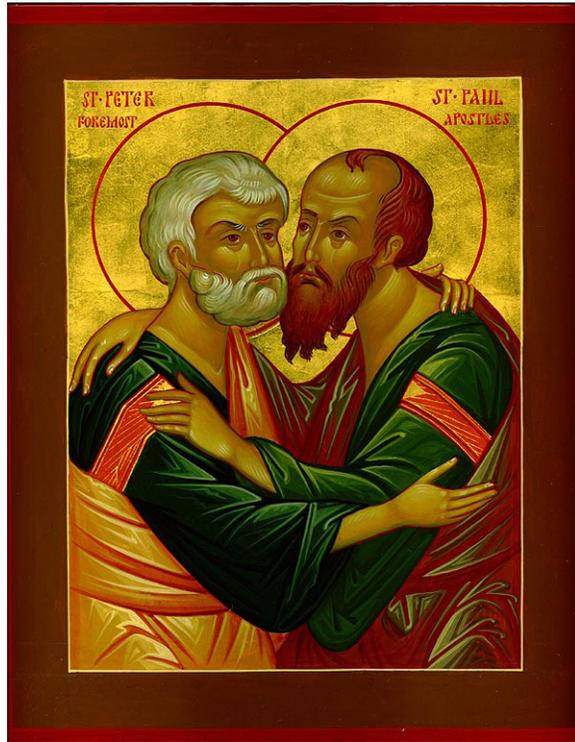


# THE MESSENGER

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE ORTHODOX CHURCH • PO BOX 12635 • 5400 ANNIE OAKLEY DRIVE  
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89112-0635 • 702.898.4800 • WWW.LASVEGASORTHODOX.COM

## JUNE 2017 Are We Apostles?



Each year, at the end of June – June 29<sup>th</sup> to be precise – the Church gathers on one of the major feast-days of the year to remember the Holy and All-praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. The day is special enough that the Church calls for a fast of varying length (depending on the date of Pascha) to prepare us for the celebration. This celebration is especially joyous in our parish, of course, because it is the patronal feastday of our church, St. Paul’s.

But beyond our unique parish focus on this day, why does the Church honor these two apostles so publicly and joyously? Certainly, part of the reason is that these two “leaders” were seen historically as the apostles of the post-resurrection Jewish community now Christian (St. Peter), and the great missionary outreach to the Gentiles (St. Paul).

In addition, Peter was one of the twelve original disciples who traveled with our Lord and was specifically named by Christ as the foremost of the apostles. And Paul was chosen in the dramatic conversion vision of Christ on the road to Damascus. Their writings compose a major portion of the New Testament.

However, it is more than that. Saints Peter and Paul, as the leaders of the apostles, become for us the icons of the apostolic nature of the Church. In our celebration of them, we exalt and remind ourselves that the Church is apostolic in nature, and we as individuals are called to be apostolic in our behavior as Christians. In short, we remember Peter and Paul because we are *apostles*.

In our Creed, we proclaim that we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. What does it mean that the Church is “apostolic?” The word apostle means “one who is sent.” The first apostles were called apostles because Jesus sent them into the world to bring the Good News of the Resurrection and the Church to anyone with the “ears to hear and the eyes to see.” The very nature of the Church is to baptize the nations, fulfilling the charge of Jesus to His disciples on the day of the Ascension (Matthew 28:16-20). We read this at every baptism of an Orthodox Christian, charging the newly-baptized with the same mission.

The apostles became apostles on that day. We become apostles on the day of our baptism. But they did not go out immediately to preach and teach. Rather, they went back to Jerusalem to await the Day of Pentecost, when each of them individually received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which revealed everything to them and empowered them to go fulfill their mission, giving birth

# JUNE 2017

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

<p style="text-align: center;">GREETERS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JUNE 4: MCAULEY/OSBURN          JUNE 11: MURPHY/CAMPBELL          JUNE 18: STAFFORD/CHONG          JUNE 25: DEMKO/WHEELER</p>	1	2	3			
<p style="text-align: right;">4</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: BROOKS          EPISTLE: HUFFMAN          POST-COMM:          KNEELING VESPERS          HOLY PENTECOST          CHURCH SCHOOL PICNIC</p>	5	6	7	<p style="text-align: center;">8</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	9	<p style="text-align: center;">10</p> <p>BAPTISM OF ZOE OSBURN,          10:00 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">11</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: ABRAHAM          EPISTLE: HALLIDAY          POST-COMM: WHEELER          HALLIDAY WEDDING          3:00 PM</p>	12	13	14	<p style="text-align: center;">15</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	16	<p style="text-align: center;">17</p> <p>PROJECT MEXICO TEAM TRAVELS, JUNE 16-22</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">18</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: HOOD          EPISTLE: BITSKO          POST-COMM: JARLSON</p>	19	20	21	<p style="text-align: center;">22</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	23	<p style="text-align: center;">24</p> <p>NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">25</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: TEFAY          EPISTLE: W. DEMKO          POST-COMM: WHEELER</p>	26	27	28	<p style="text-align: center;">29</p> <p>SS. PETER AND PAUL          DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM          ERITREAN SERVICE, 9:30 AM</p>	30	<p style="text-align: center;">July 1</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>

# St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

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## CHOIR DIRECTORS

Matushka Elizabeth Dresko  
Grace Brooks

## PARISH COUNCIL

Virginia Hood, Vice-President  
Karen Short, Treasurer  
Catherine Wilkalis, Secretary

Gregory Brooks  
James Brophy  
Kevin McAuley  
Karen Murphy  
Litsa Osburn  
Joseph Wheeler

## SUB-COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds  
Kevin McAuley

Eritrean & Ethiopian Outreach  
Tekeste Nuguru

Russian Outreach  
Natalia Minkoff

Church School/Youth  
Amy McAuley

Fellowship Committee  
Charity Committee

to the Church. We also receive the same outpouring of the Spirit, when we are anointed with Holy Chrism, being “sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” after our baptism. Truth is revealed to us, and we are sent into the world.

The Church is also “apostolic” in the succession of the Holy Priesthood. Every priest, deacon and bishop is ordained by the laying on of hands by a bishop(s) who, if we traced back every set of hands laid on every head, would finally bring us back to the hands of one of the original apostles. This historical and sacramental faithfulness ensures that the Church is the Church. There are no self-styled, self-ordained leaders in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. There is only an unbroken line of succession from the original apostles, each person ordained recognized and called by the Church to the ministry exercised.

But in examining the question of “Are we apostles?”, there are really only two measurements that we must take. Those two measurements are mission and message.

**Mission.** If we begin with the premise that each of us, through our baptism and chrismation, are apostles (and I believe we are and, more importantly, that the Church teaches that we are) the measurement becomes “how well do we know the apostolic mission” and “how well do we fulfill it?” The apostolic mission is that we must bring Christ and the Church to anyone who, in purity of heart, is seeking Him. That can be someone never churching, someone who was churching into error, or someone who is disaffected and disillusioned with their “church.” We all know people who fit into each category. How we fulfill that mission is easily pondered.

When was the last time I asked someone to “come and see” the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? When was the last time I spoke about my parish with enthusiasm and joy to anyone not already in our parish (or, for that matter, to anyone in our parish)? When was the last time that I actually, in my personal prayers, prayed to God for the stability, growth and well being of our parish? When was the last time I thanked God in prayer for the oasis of the Church in this des-

## AT A GLANCE...

**June 3: Choir Rehearsal after Vespers**

**June 4: HOLY PENTECOST**

**Church School Picnic follows Kneeling Vespers**

**June 4-10: FAST-FREE WEEK**

**June 6-7: DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING (FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN)**

**June 11: Halliday/McDonald Wedding, 3:00 PM**

**June 12: APOSTLES FAST BEGINS**

**June 16-22: ST. PAUL TEAM AT PROJECT MEXICO**

**June 20: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM**

**June 24: Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM; NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**

**FR. JOHN 38TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION**

**June 29: Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM; SS. PETER AND PAUL (PARISH FEASTDAY)**

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

ert of the fallen world? When was the last time I cheerfully, sacrificially, and with conviction, gave from my material blessings to ensure the mission of our parish and Church? These are the questions, and more importantly the answers, that measure how I fulfill the apostolic mission.

**Message.** To me, one of the absolute proofs that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is the fact that she has never wavered in her preaching and teaching. What the apostles preached is exactly what the Church preaches today. It has never been anything but that. The Church has always tried to make the message speak to a given people, in a given place, at a given time. Certainly, 21st century Las Vegas is a little different from 1st century Jerusalem. But the message itself has never changed. The liturgy that we celebrate today is the direct descendant and completely faithful (theologically and spiritually) to the Last Supper and the liturgical celebration that began with the apostles in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of wine in the upper room. But then the measurement of our fulfillment of that message is “Do we know it?”. Simple questions gauge our faithfulness to the message.

When was the last time I read the Bible with the eyes of the Church, seeking not my own answers, but eternal Truths which were given and revealed by the Lord? When was the last time that I defended the Faith from any sort of falsehood and misguided teaching? When was the last time I put aside my own desires and pursuits (even when they seem “right” or “wholesome”) because they did not match behavior taught by the Lord and His Church? When was the last time I truly studied my Faith, reading, learning and questioning tenets and

teachings? When was the last time that I engaged in activities that “everyone else” does, knowing that the activities were questionable or even immoral?

As we get ready to celebrate our parish feastday and remember the Holy Apostles, it would be good for us to ponder and answer these and perhaps many other questions. The answers may surprise, perhaps disappoint, maybe even excite us. But no matter what, they will measure the depth of our apostleship. And do not be mistaken – each and every one of us is an apostle!

O Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, pray unto God for us! Strengthen and gird us with apostolic zeal and fortitude. And help us to fulfill our apostolic mission with the apostolic message.

*Father John*

#### FEASTDAYS

During June, we celebrate the following feastdays:

#### HOLY PENTECOST

##### DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

June 4

VESPERS WITH LITIYA, 5:00 PM (SAT)

DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SUN)

**KNEELING VESPERS FOLLOWS LITURGY**

##### NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

(38<sup>TH</sup> ORDINATION ANNIVERSARY FOR FATHER JOHN)

JUNE 24

DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)

##### HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

(PARISH PATRONAL FEASTDAY)

JUNE 29

VESPERS/LITIYA, 6:30 PM (WED)

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (THUR)

#### SPECIAL OCCASIONS

We will have some special sacramen-

tal celebrations during June. *Daniel Green*, son of Athan, will be baptized on June 3. *Zoe Osburn*, daughter of Fr. Stephen and Matushka Lindsey, will be baptized on June 10. Both at 10:00 AM.

*Kimbel (Kirill) Halliday and Carrie McDonald* will be united in Holy Matrimony on Sunday, June 11, at 3:00 PM.

#### PROJECT MEXICO

It's finally here! After a year's worth of work and fundraising, our Project Mexico team, led by Fr. Stephen, will be heading down on June 16 for their charitable work. While down there, they will build from scratch a new home for a family who has nothing. While that transforms the lives of those new home owners, the trip transforms our young people even more. They will return on June 22. We ask every member of St. Paul's to lift them up in prayer during their journey – for safe travel down, profitable labor and a safe return. May God bless them for their gift of time and talent to those in need!

#### CHOIR REHEARSAL

There is one scheduled choir rehearsal during June. It will be held after Vespers on Saturday, June 3. All choir members are asked to try to be present.

#### PENTECOST/PICNIC

Pentecost Sunday is June 4. During the liturgy, we will remember our church school staff and students for the past year's efforts. Following liturgy, we will celebrate the customary Kneeling Vespers of Pentecost, which is the first time the Church calls us to kneel in prayer since Pascha.

Following the liturgical celebration of Pentecost, we will share fellowship in our annual Church School Picnic, with grillmasters providing

hots and hamburgers. A sign-up list for pot luck items is available in the church hall.

### FAST-FREE/APOSTLES FAST

The week following Pentecost, June 4-11, is a *fast-free* week in the Orthodox Church.

BUT - The Apostles Fast always begins on the day after All Saints Sunday (this year that is June 12). It continues until our celebration of the parish patronal feastday of Ss. Peter and Paul on June 29.

### TRAVELS

Father John will be away June 6-7, attending the Bishop's Advisory Council and Diocesan Council Meetings in San Francisco.

### SLAVONIC SERVICES

There will be no Slavonic services here in June. Father Alexander anticipates returning as usual in July on the second Saturday of the month.

### ADULT CLASS

Our Adult Faith Forum has gone on summer hiatus. We will resume in September and complete our discussion on *The Parables of Christ*.

### FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be held on a date to be announced, probably in September. 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 Ortho-

dox 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.

### VACATIONS

We are now in the summer travel season, as kids finish school and families plan trips. If you are planning a vacation, it is easy to discover the location of a local Orthodox Church in your destination. Parishes can be located on oca.org or the websites of the other Orthodox Churches in North America. Check out a parish where you vacation – it can be fun and spiritually profitable.

### FAREWELL

The associate priest at our sister parish of St. John the Baptist, Father Matthew Swehla, and his family will be leaving Las Vegas. He has been assigned as the new pastor at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Beaverton, Oregon. His last service at St. John's here is Pentecost Sunday.

Many of us at St. Paul's got to know Fr. Matthew, especially our young people through joint retreats. He has become a fine priest that we will miss. We wish him, Presvytera Annie, and their children nothing but the best in their new assignment. May God grant them Many Years and a fruitful labor in Beaverton.

### 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 ac-**

**cepting 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](http://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

##### MAY 23, 2017 MEETING

*Rector's Report:* Fr. John thanked everyone for their help in keeping the parish running smoothly while he and Matushka Liz were on vacation.

Reminded council he will be attending the regular quarterly Diocesan Council meeting June 6-7 in San Francisco.

Informed council that he anticipates 6 new catechumens soon, including a family of four.

*Associate Priest's Report:* reported that his attendance at the Clergy Retreat this past May 2-4 was interesting.

Reminded council that his

daughter Zoe will be baptized on June 10 at 10 AM.

*Vice President's Report:* no report.

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

Capital Fund: \$247.42

Rainy Day: \$42,596.06

Icon Fund: \$3,359.00

Income for April was \$36,533.58, with expenses of \$22,760.18 for a surplus of \$13,773.40.

#### 2017 YTD FINANCIALS

2017 Inc \$ 120,875.05

2017 Exp \$ 91,405.47

Inc over Exp \$ 29,469.58

Accounts Payable is totally current. Karen reports that although summer and early fall months have been historically a leaner time for the parish, today it is much more stable financially than previous years. She does not anticipate any unusual problems.

#### COMMITTEES

##### *Buildings and Grounds:*

*HVAC:* on Sunday, 5/8/17, Fr. John called a special meeting of the parish council to discuss status of aged and malfunctioning HVAC units in parish hall. A quorum was present. Council members were presented with the option to either repair or replace the units. Replacing compressors would cost ~2k for each unit with no guarantees vs. replacing entire units for 6.4k with warranty. Cedimir would do installation. The expense is under "maintenance" and not a capital improvement. Joe Wheeler moved and Ginny Hood seconded, motion passed unanimously. The bid for new units stands at \$12,800 and they are currently being installed.

*Doors:* Kevin reports doors will be done in two weeks. Deliver on 6/2;

installation on 6/3. Details regarding paperwork and cash flow will be worked out between Kevin, Karen Short and the contractor.

*Sound Panels:* a few remaining sound panels need to be installed in parish hall after HVAC installation is complete.

*Courtyard:* No update at this time. Fr. John commented that all financial data and other specific details for this project must be complete and submitted at least 3 weeks before scheduling any special parish meeting. Agenda for the special parish meeting would include both the courtyard and the parish hall kitchen remodel projects.

*Carpeting:* Status quo – Sean Campbell has not responded to two separate inquires.

*Ladies Room:* Toilet was fixed by plumber at cost of \$169+. This will be covered by the Eritrean Community as the damages happened on their watch.

*Kitchen Cabinets:* measurements were taken by Bill Murphy of Home Depot and a schematic design drawing was submitted to council members. The funds would not be drawn from the capital fund but from the savings account. Additional costs include a commercial electric stove estimated at \$3000; a new kitchen sink at \$200; and appliances such as microwave, new dishwasher at \$300-400, etc. are extra. The kitchen remodel project would need to be approved at a special parish meeting.

*Charity:* "Feeding the Homeless" accomplished Saturday, 5/20. Over 150 lunches, hygiene kits and socks distributed. Expenditures were \$110.48 for an approximate cost of \$.73 per lunch. There is a balance of \$62.39 left in the fund. Next feeding is projected for September.

A large amount of food donations were also given to Friends in the

Desert Food Bank this month.

*IOCC:* no report. Replacement for Joe is still an ongoing effort.

*Church School/Youth:* Finished May 7th. Amy McAuley and Fr. Stephen discussed projected plans for the parish youth including possibly holding church camp at St. Nicholas Orthodox Camp (Antiochian) in California as early as next year. Advance registration would be \$465 per week. Tentative plans may include alternating Church Camp every other year with Project Mexico.

*Project Mexico:* financial and logistical details are being finalized including Mexican insurance and cost of gas for 2 vans. Approximately \$1000 will be needed for the trip. Sambusa sale made \$240. Some additional funds will be donated. We don't anticipate any problems with expenses being covered. Jamie Campbell is going and will use his van, eliminating need for second rental. Nineteen people will attend. They will leave Friday 6/16 and return on Thursday 6/22.

*Eritrean/Ethiopian:* no report.

*Fellowship:* Fellowship and Church School cookout will be on Pentecost Sunday 6/4. Kevin will check propane tank on grill.

*Outreach/website:* Fr. Stephen fixed a "security hole" on parish website and performed tweaks and other upgrades as needed. He can upload sermons to web site from his phone now. Site is number one on Google.

*Russian:* There will be no Russian Liturgy 6/10 due to Zoe Osburn's baptism.

*Stewardship:* no report

## OLD BUSINESS

*Greeters Training:* status quo.

*Sunshine Group:* status quo

*Legal Matters:* reports there has been no activity or further complaints from the neighbor, her legal counsel or the parish legal counsel regarding the groundwater issue at this time.

## NEW BUSINESS

*Insurance: (Joe Wheeler)* Guide One Insurance mailed a summary to the parish regarding the inspection they did in February 2017 and noted some risk- management issues.

In summary these include: 1) Fire extinguishers need to be serviced every 12 months. 2) Outside contractors should be named as additional insured on the contractor's insurance policy; enter into a hold harmless agreement with the contractor. 3) Obtain certificates of insurance from all contractors who perform work for the church. (This may need to include volunteers.)

The insurance company requires a reply indicating the actions the parish will take to manage the risk within a 45 day time period. Noncompliance may affect coverage or pricing. After discussion, council agreed Kevin McAuley and Ginny Hood would coordinate with the contractors. Joe Wheeler will coordinate our response to the insurance company.

Karen Short noted that under Nevada law, we would be responsible for worker's comp for workers without insurance. We should have a certificate of insurance on file so if a casual laborer is here they are covered. Ginny will talk to the landscaper and the hall cleaning service.

Fr. John mentioned that the background checks will now be done centrally through each diocesan office starting in September. We have risk-management tips (Safechurch) sent regularly from our insurer.

*Next Council Meeting:*

Tuesday, June 20, 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 JUNE

Alexandra Allred  
June 12, 2002

Alexei Kaganovitch  
June 12, 2007

Girmai Johannes  
June 15, 1999

Amelia Vranesh  
June 17, 1991

John Vishnevsky  
June 19, 2007

Dorin Mihai Gutu  
June 21, 1989

Rose Silecky  
June 22, 2007

## FATHER STEPHEN'S CORNER GOD AND 'MURICA

Over the last few weeks I have been reflecting on the political nature of this country and how it relates to religious freedom. Back in January, I wrote that the most important thing for us as Orthodox Christians wasn't who our civil leaders were, but that our true leader is Jesus Christ as King and God. Ultimately, what matters most is how we prepare ourselves daily by reading Scripture, helping the poor and needy, serving others, repenting of our sins, saying our daily prayers, forgiving everyone who wrongs us, and putting the life of the Church first in our lives.

Yet, today it seems the issue is much

deeper than I may have originally proposed. Yes, everything I just listed comes first in our lives, but the thing I want to reflect on this month that has made me want to revisit all of this has to do with religious freedom.

As a disclaimer, I am not going to propose any kind of partisan opinion (other than what the Church believes); rather, this is a reflection that solely focuses on how often religious freedom is taken for granted and how understanding it, can actually lead to a better Christian life - a more focused one at that.

There is always the argument made by some that this country is full of flaws. The system is broken. Politicians of all parties win elections on this basic premise. However, over the last few years, religious freedom has become a key issue in many elections and in policy. We as Orthodox Christians have been pitted against one another on key issues such as abortion, same sex marriage, the death penalty, and the role of government in our lives.

The United States is unique in that it isn't formed by ethnicity but by creed. France was founded by Franks. Greece founded by Greeks. Russia founded by Slavs. And so on. But the USA is founded upon the principles of democracy and attempts to prove to the world that it can be a viable, though not perfect, way to exist as a country and society. It is here where the birthplace of separation of church and state exist.

In some ways, this concept has made the world a much better place. When put into practice, it has allowed space for companies to form and grow, create new things, and revolutionize human life as we understand it. At its best, it has allowed the US to be a

place of acceptance, innovation, and change that has not only bettered humanity but the Church as a whole. The Church has seen widespread growth and in my personal opinion on one issue, has forced us to learn how to tithe as is biblically commanded, since the aid of the government is not present. Furthermore, unlike many countries throughout the world, we can also meet for regular Sunday Liturgy without fear of any terror attack on our building or people. Certainly these things happen from time to time, but this is due more to individuals and not to government.

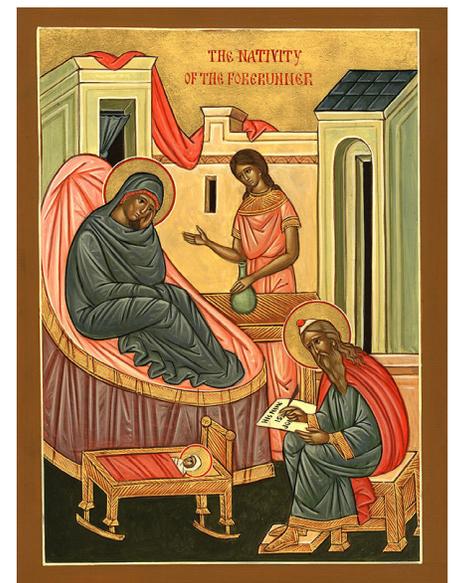
But this simplicity is also what makes it difficult for us as Orthodox to relate to our country. On the one hand, we know that we have this freedom to worship without fear. On the other hand, we are also called to engage the world and culture around us as part of living out the life of our faith. The liturgy might end at around 10:30 AM in our building but it never ends in our lives. We are compelled to participate in the life and processes of our nation, but also must do so as Orthodox Christians.

What happens for many of us is we become rooted in the hegemony or utter control of the people around us. Governments fail when their citizens follow them blindly. They use the means of culture and education to create this focus on patriotism and nationalism that they then instill in every citizen whenever they possibly can. This too can lead us to become invested more in our preferred political candidates or policies, creating a type of savior, rather than on our own savior Jesus Christ.

I conclude by saying, we must always be careful in how we live our lives in this country. We have a lot of free-

dom. This is easy to take for granted. We must consistently remind ourselves that it is okay to say, "we love our country and everything it gives us"; however, if that isn't followed by, "but we love Christ more" it is meaningless. We bring good to the world and we bring more people to Christ when we focus ourselves on His Commandments. Religious freedom is something we greatly enjoy but our Faith is first and foremost. There may come a time when this freedom won't be afforded to us anymore. We already see this in the millions of babies murdered through abortion, the destruction of family with same-sex marriage and single parenthood, the massive wars throughout the world, and our lack of care for Creation in the environment.

So let us not lose sight in this concern, instead let us remind ourselves all people are created in the image and likeness of God, and that Christ commands us to go forth and baptize all nations. We must live the Christian life and uphold its values first, while we still can. So enjoy your religious freedom but use it to promote the Church and Christ's message.



NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN  
JUNE 24