

THE PARISH NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2016

The Nativity of the Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church
617 Sand Creek Road, Albany NY (518) 869-3932

A parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad www.albanyrocor.org

Rector: Protopriest Alexis Duncan ; Protopriest Michael Fritz

Protodeacon: Fr. Michael Soloviev

PLEASE NOTE: HOURS AND LITURGY BEGIN AT 9:30 AM

DECEMBER NAMESDAYS

5	Matushka Cecelia Soloviev	19	Father Deacon Nicholas Drobot
6	Gregory Cherkezov		Reader Nick Taylor
7	Catherine Taylor		Nick Milas
	Katherine Paukova		Nicholas Scott
13	Rev. Andrei Rudenko		Nik Roschko
	Andrew Federow-Adams		Nick Stabinsky
	Andrei Kosovskij	25	Jonathan Baker
	Andrew Nedvedek		Abigail Taylor
17	Barbara Nikiforov		Rebecca Taylor
			Abigail Welsh
		29	Daniel Welsh

MNOGAYA LETA! MANY YEARS to all of our Parishioners celebrating their Namesday in the month of December.

CHURCH CLEANING SCHEDULE

Thank you to everyone who has helped in keeping our Church clean. If you are interested in cleaning the Church - this goes for men too, it is not ONLY a woman's job - please contact Maria Hauf. The Church needs to be cleaned weekly and Maria Hauf is more than willing to go over what has to be done. If you are able to volunteer for a month (clean 4 times) or for a couple of weeks, or are willing to be a "Substitute" cleaner, please contact Maria at 253-9286 as soon as possible

DECEMBER	STILL AVAILABLE - Anyone?????
JAN 2017	M. Cecelia Soloviev & Alex McClure
FEB 2017	M. Cecelia Soloviev & Alex McClure
MARCH 2017	M. Cecelia Soloviev & Alex McClure

Thank you to everyone!



CHURCH FRESCOES

Thank you to Father Theodore and his helper Irene for the beautiful work they did on the next stage of our Church Frescoes. We paid Father Theodore the last installment and our Fresco Fund is now depleted. We hope that everyone will be generous to the Fresco Fund so we will have enough money collected to pay Father Theodore when he returns next year to continue his beautiful work. It is estimated that we will need another \$15,000 when he returns next year. If you would like to make a donation to the Fresco Fund, please contact Reader John (Rick) Schuler. All donations would be greatly appreciated for the beautification of our Church. What a perfect way to remember someone's birthday or anniversary - make a donation to the Church Fresco fund and the gift will be remembered every time you come to Church.

CHURCH SCHOOL CLASSES

Church School classes are held EVERY Sunday and we hope ALL of the children of our Parish will participate in the classes. If you are interested in enrolling you child in Church School, please speak to Mat. Anna for more information. If anyone is interested in teaching Church School as a regular teacher or substitute, they are asked to contact Fr. Alexis. Adult discussion groups also take place during the same time as the Church School classes. Church School classes are held BEFORE Liturgy (8:k30 AM) on the first and third Sundays of the month - since we have Sisterhood and Council meetings on those Sundays. On the second, fourth and possibly fifth Sunday of the month, classes are held after Coffee Hours.

Hello choir members,

We are approaching Christmas quickly – but on the brighter side that means we will begin having choir rehearsals practicing music for Nativity! The Nativity rehearsal schedule will be a little more stringent, as we have a lot to prepare. I would expect us to start having rehearsal every Monday night rather than every other Monday night. Thus, the tentative rehearsals for Christmas will be:

Monday, Dec. 5
Monday, Dec. 12

Monday, Dec. 19
Monday, Dec. 26

Monday, Jan. 2

all at 7 PM at the church. Thanks, and I look forward to our practices! Niki Schuler

Thank you to Nikhon and all of our wonderful singers - our choir is absolutely beautiful and your hard work is greatly appreciated.

SISTERHOOD NEWS

TASTE OF RUSSIA - Thank you, thank you, thank you to everyone who made the Taste of Russia such a wonderful success. We almost sold out of all our food! Just a little Borscht and Stroganoff was left. Our baked goods table did a fantastic business and thank you to all of our bakers. The Arts and Crafts table did a booming business. Thank you to our performers - the beautiful singing, dancing and piano playing, I know all of our visitors loved the entertainment - you all did a fantastic job. Thank you to Father Michael, Father Alexis and Reader Eugene who gave tours of our beautiful Church. I can't thank everyone by name, but you know who you are - THANK YOU. All in all, a success. The total profit for the day is a little over \$7,000.

YOLKA - This year's Yolka will be held on Sunday, January 15th. Many of our talented children perform at the Yolka, by singing, playing an instrument, dancing, etc. If you would like your child to perform, please contact Junia Dragon and/or Alika Wolkov who are in charge of the entertainment portion of the Yolka. If you would like to help with the food portion of the Yolka, please speak to RaeLynn (Anastasia) Gonyea. Yolka will be here before we know it, so please have your children prepare - it is always a fun day for all.

COFFEE HOURS - If you are not a Coffee Hour hostess and would like to join in providing a meal for our parishioners, please contact RaeLynn (Anastasia) Gonyea - Sisterhood President. If you stay for Coffee hours, you know that this meal is enjoyed by many. It is a great opportunity for our little children to play and for the adults to gather and socialize. We are indeed a Church Family, and Coffee hours give us a wonderful opportunity to interact and share in each others lives.

COFFEE HOUR HOSTESSES: Hostesses are reminded to please clean the kitchen, washing all dishes and PLEASE put them away. Please take any used towels home to wash and return to the hall. Please make sure all trash is removed from the hall, kitchen and bathrooms. Please make sure the bathrooms are cleaned (trash removed, toilets clean, toilet paper & paper towels replenished) and the hall floor is swept and any dirty spots are mopped. There is no one who presently cleans the Church Hall on a regular basis, so we are relying on our Coffee Hour hostesses and parishioners to help keep the hall clean. THANK YOU.

SISTERHOOD MEETINGS: Sisterhood meeting are usually held on the first Sunday of the month, following our Coffee Hours. As you know, our Sisterhood is active in the beautification and cleaning of our Church, providing delicious meals, planning Festivals and fundraisers and of course our Church Feastday. If you would like to join St. Olga's Sisterhood, please stay for one of our meetings and please get involved. We need help throughout the year, and new ideas are always welcomed. Upcoming meeting dates: December 4, January 8, February 5, March 5, April 2, May 7, and June 11.

HALL USAGE: There are a few dates during the month of December that our hall is being rented. These dates are as follows: Saturday, 12/3; Every Monday night (Square Dancers); Every Thursday night (Fr. Matthew's Religious Discussion group); Friday, 12/9. Please consider the dates if you have to go to the hall for any reason so as not to disturb these renters. Thank you.

Holy Epiphany Church Accessibility & Expansion Project Boston, Massachusetts

If you were at Coffee Hour on Sunday, November 27th, you heard Reader John Schuler's plea for our Parish to help our Sister Parish in Boston, MA. The Boston parish has always been very generous to our parish during the construction of our new church and also continue to support us during our Parish Feastdays and other fundraisers. The Boston Church is in the process of expanding their Church and making it handicap accessible. There are fliers available in Church explaining the expansion project and also commemoration slips to send in names with your donation. You may visit Holy Epiphany's website to see photos of the new construction at www.bostonrussianchurch.org Or if you would like to speak with someone regarding the expansion project, you may contact Ilia Jarostchuk at 781-254-9717 or ilia.jarostchuk@gmail.com. May God bless you for your generosity.

PROJECT TIKHVIN AND THE TIKHVIN BALL

The monastery of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God has stood near the banks of the Tikhvinka River since the 14th century. This place was chosen by the Mother of God Herself as a resting place for the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God, painted by the Holy Evangelist Luke. The monastery has seen invasions, battles, civil upheavals and closure by the godless in our last century. The present cathedral was built by Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Project Tikhvin has taken up the task of providing the youth of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad the opportunity to journey to Tikhvin to assist in restoring this ancient and holy place. The Project is charged with raising the necessary funds to enable this restoration. All those who work with this project do so on a purely voluntary basis and receive no salary. The Project is blessed by His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. It is administered by the St. Seraphim Camp.

To help with the cost of the trip and to keep expenses of our youth volunteers at a minimum, we need to raise money for this project. Therefore, we are holding **the TIKHVIN BALL on FEBRUARY 10th, 2017**. Please save this date, and plan to attend. It is NOT only an evening for our youth, but for all ages. More information will be posted in the January Newsletter.

UPDATED PARISH DIRECTORY

The Parish Council would like to update our parish directory. We would like to add e-mail addresses for our parishioners. We have been blessed with new families joining our parish and would like to include them on our e-mail mailing list so they will be aware of any parish news. Please contact Tasia Fedorov with any updated information: if your address has changed, if you are new to the parish or have a new phone number or e-mail address. I will try to contact people during Coffee hours to get their updated information. If you know someone new to the parish, who may not be on or e-mail list, please tell them to contact Tasia - thank you.

NEW PARISHIONER'S

You may have noticed some new faces in Church. Please welcome these people to our parish - make them feel welcome. Sit with them during Coffee Hour, tell them about our Sisterhood, Church School, Choir etc. Be friendly, so these people will be glad to return.

ST. HERMAN'S YOUTH CONFERENCE

"For our good, for our happiness, at least let us make a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will!" St. Herman of Alaska

The St. Herman Conference was founded in the 1970's to attract young people to gather in prayer and services, listening to inspiring lectures, having opportunity to gather as the Body of Christ. Since that time, each year, the youth of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has been nurtured by countless moments of spiritual fervor and a deepening dedication to the Lord's Holy Church. Through lectures, workshops, discussions and social activities participants grow in faith and love for each other with a renewed sense of commitment to the mission of the Church and the fundamental transformation of their lives in the light of Christ. We hosted the conference last year - and our parishioners may remember the work that went into planning such an event.

This year's St. Herman Conference (East) will be held in the St. John the Baptist Cathedral in Washington, DC. This year marks the 50th year of the repose of the great Wonderworker St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. Archpriest Peter Perekrestov will deliver a lecture on this marvelous archpastor. Fr. Patrick Viscuso will also deliver a lecture on Islam. Many workshops and discussions are planned as well.

All registrations must be completed on line. sthermanconference@gmail.com The fee of \$300.00 includes all lodging, meals and local transportation. After the early registration date of November 20, the fees will increase to **\$350.00** and no scholarships will be available after that date. Final registration is December 10, 2016.

REGISTER

All Conferees must register online and stay at the hotel. Only local parishioners of St. John Cathedral may commute to the conference. All conferees must review and abide by the rules of conduct in the registration process and any violation will result in exclusion from the conference and hotel with no refund of fees.

All rooms are quad occupancy. Those who prefer double or single occupancy will be charged an additional fee for the rooms. Limited scholarships are available and must be requested in writing along with a recommendation from their parish priest.

If you are planning to attend - you must register **IMMEDIATELY**. December 10th is the deadline. Many of our children are planning to attend. We are hoping to provide rides to Washington DC to minimize the number of people who will need to drive. If you or your child will be attending, and will need a ride - please contact Fr. Alexis.

Be careful, my children, not to judge anyone, especially if he is a man of God. I beg you, guard yourselves from this sin. Look after yourselves and be conscious of your own faults. With this consciousness we will be able to repent.

*St. Nephon
Stories, Sermons, and Prayers of Saint Nephon*

WHY FAST BEFORE THE NATIVITY -from the “Orthodox Church of America Website)

We fast before the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Savior in order to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Our Lord’s birth. As in the case of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast is one of preparation, during which we focus on the coming of the Savior by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

By fasting, we “shift our focus” from ourselves to others, spending less time worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on in order to use our time in increased prayer and caring for the poor. We learn through fasting that we can gain control over things which we sometimes allow to control us—and for many people, food is a controlling factor. We live in the only society in which we have several TV networks devoted to food! While fasting from food, however, we are also challenged to fast from sin, from gossip, from jealousy, from anger, and from those other things which, while well within our control, we all too often allow to control us.

Just as we would refrain from eating a lot before going to an expensive restaurant for dinner—if we “ruin our appetite” we will enjoy the restaurant less—so too we fast before the Nativity in order to more fully feast and celebrate on the Nativity itself.

During the Nativity Fast, we are called upon to refrain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and olive oil. At the same time, we are challenged, within this framework, to fast to the best of our ability, and to do so consistently. If we must modify the extent to which we fast within this framework, it is of course possible, but in every instance our fasting should be consistent and regular, for Christ does not see fasting as an option, but as a “must.”

In Matthew Christ says, “WHEN you fast, do not be like the hypocrites,” not “IF you fast” or “IF YOU CHOOSE to fast.”

Finally, it seems quite odd that in our society—a society in which people gladly and freely spend huge sums of money for diets, most of which recommend that one refrain from red meats and dairy products—fasting is not more widely embraced. How odd that a Jenny Craig consultant or diet guru or physician will tell us to refrain from eating meat or cheese or butter and we will gladly embrace—and pay large sums of money for—his or her advice, while when the Church offers the same advice [at “no cost”] we tend to balk, as if we were being asked to do the impossible.

Church Etiquette - A couple of points to remember:

When attending the Vigil, it is improper to sit during the Six Psalms and the reading of the Gospel. We are, of course, supposed to stand for the whole Vigil except during readings which sometimes follow “O Gentle Light” and during Kathisma readings. It is understood that some people have weakness or infirmities that prevent them always standing, but this should not apply to the above times. It is also improper to move around the church venerating icons, lighting candles, etc. during the Cherubic Hymn, the Eucharistic Canon (from “It is meet and right” to “It is truly meet”), or the Lord’s Prayer at Divine Liturgy. If you enter the church late, during one of these times, simply stand quietly in the back until it is appropriate to move around.

SUPPORTING YOUR PARISH

As much as we might groan and grumble about it, we know that paying taxes is part of our responsibility as citizens of this country. Just as we should know that as parishioners we have a responsibility to contribute to the financial support of our parish. It is evident, however, from the strained and meagre budgets on which so many of our parishes operate that this is a sadly neglected area of our Christian life. Why is this? And what can be done to correct it?

Priests feel awkward about speaking on the subject: they do not want to be perceived as greedy of filthy lucre; money tends to be a sensitive issue; people grow tired, even resentful of frequent appeals, and priests do not want to cause offense by suggesting that someone is not giving enough, or to imply that the Sacraments carry a price tag. Parishioners, meanwhile, often do not know what is expected of them in this regard: there are the token memberships dues, but there are no “rules” for financial giving, as there are for fasting, for example. Because such giving is purely voluntary, we tend to give from our “surplus,” after our “real” expenses have been met: food, utilities, health insurance, etc. It is all too easy to assume that other parishioners are in a position to give more than we, and that once we attain financial security we, too, will contribute more to the parish. Those of us raised in the Church may harbor the attitude: the parish has “always” been there; it has “always” managed to pay the bills; what comes in on the collection plate is supplemented by the annual bazaar, and if something special is needed – say, a new set of vestments – the parish makes an appeal. Others may have a spiritualized perception of the parish as a place where “laying aside all earthly cares” includes financial concerns. Many of us give when we feel inspired to do so, and we may give very generously to some cause that strikes us as being particularly worthy, but this does not fulfill our obligation to our parish, which seldom figures as the recipient of such inspired giving.

These various attitudes and haphazard practices are in large measure responsible for the financially constrained state of so many of our parishes today. In the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, only the largest parishes – and not all – support their clergy. People expect their priest to be in church Sunday after Sunday (not to mention Saturday nights and feastdays), arriving before and leaving after everyone else, to be on call for counselling and emergencies, to be available for services of needs – molebens and panikhidas – on top of working full time at a secular job and attending to his family. How can clergy in such situations possibly be expected to have the energy to properly nurture parish life or do evangelical work? Many of them are already on the brink of burn-out. Clearly, if our parishes had reliable and adequate incomes – such as could support a priest – they could be much more effective, both in their internal and external missions.

These practical considerations, however, are not the heart of the matter, which is, first and foremost, a spiritual concern. Supporting one’s parish should be as much an accepted part of spiritual life as prayer and fasting. We give not for the benefit of our parish – this is simply a consequence; we give for the benefit of our souls. Our giving should be guided not by parish budgets but by Biblical principles.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to give a tenth of their increase to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-34; Num. 18:21-24). This is called a tithe, and in contemporary terms translates to ten percent of one’s gross income. With the establishment of the New Covenant, many of the Old Testament laws and regulations became obsolete. Christ Himself, however, makes it clear that the tithing requirement was not abolished. In an oft-quoted passage on the subject, He does not upbraid the Pharisees for paying tithes, but for neglecting the weightier

matters of the law: judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other (i.e., tithing) undone (Matt. 23:23). Christ came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17), to breathe life into what had become a dead and empty legalism. It was not the Pharisees' observance of the law that Christ denounced but their attitude: their pride, their boasting, their self-satisfaction, their disdain for those who did not keep the letter of the law. This was their measure of righteousness. But what does Christ say to us: Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20). And He proceeds to contrast the minimalism of the Old Testament law with the maximal intent that lies at the heart of His new testament ethic: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill... But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment (Matt. 5:21-22). Adultery and divorce are similarly redefined, while an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is supplanted by the higher command to turn the other cheek. Leading His listeners further up the spiritual ladder, Christ enjoins them to love their enemies, do good to them that hate you... Finally, He says, Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

In this spirit, we can see that tithing is a baseline requirement, as it were, of our spiritual life. We should practice tithing as a matter of course. Nor should this give us cause to be proud, for we are simply doing that which is our duty to do, as unprofitable servants (cf. Luke 17:10). Tithing precedes almsgiving on the path to perfection where, far ahead of us, we have the example of those early Christians who sold their houses and lands and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet for distribution (Acts 4:32-25), and of the widow whose two mites that she cast into the treasury constituted all her living (Mark 12:42-44).

Some may protest, "How can I possibly tithe on my salary, when I am just making it as it is, what with regular expenses and saving for college tuition and retirement..." A single mother with two boys, barely making ends meet, raised similar objections when a friend recommended that she set aside ten percent of her slim paycheck. But she decided to try. She began at three percent, and, discovering that she scarcely noticed the difference, increased the amount to five percent, seven percent, and soon she was saving ten percent. The woman is now a financial advisor on Wall Street.

Many Protestants practice tithing, and there is no reason we Orthodox should not do likewise. If we are afraid of the financial strain this might impose, we can begin with a lesser amount, like the woman in the above example, or like someone learning to fast. Eventually, however, we should work up to the ten percent that is our moral obligation. It should become a matter of conscience, like fasting, or saying our morning and evening prayers. Whether other people in the parish tithe or just how the parish uses our money should be of no concern to us (assuming no evident corruption). What we give, we give to God – with no strings or emotional attachments. And we should tithe willingly, recognizing that all we have is from God, and that our tithe will accrue to our spiritual benefit, as promised by the Lord, Who said through His prophet:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove Me now herewith ... if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. ... and all nations shall call you blessed...
(Malachi 3:10-12) *As taken from Pravirmir.com*