

PARISH LIFE: 2007 SO FAR

Our first services this year were the Orthodox Christmas services on January 6th and 7th. The church looked beautiful in green vestments, having been cleaned and prepared by a group of parishioners at our clean-up day on December 30th. The Christmas services were well attended, and all present at the service on Christmas Day received a small gift afterwards: the children a bag of toys and sweets, and the adults a chocolate. A small group returned on the evening of Christmas Day for Vespers at 6.00pm, staying afterwards to sing Christmas Carols in the darkened church. We had no service on the feast of Theophany this year, as Father James served in Wallsend. The Great Blessing of Water was served on Sunday January 21st, however, and Father James was able to visit and bless homes with the Holy Water on Saturday 20th and again on Sunday 21st, after church. Two babies arrived in the parish in January: a son, Zachary, for Peter and Tanya Iliuk, and a daughter, Melanie, for Victor and Susie Bendeovski. On the first Sunday in February we held a well-attended BBQ in honour of our hard-working Ladies' Auxiliary, and on the second Saturday our fourth Annual Fishing Competition was held. All of this has made for a good start to 2007. May the Lord continue to bless our small parish in the year ahead!

PARISH LIFE: TWO BIRTHS AND BAPTISMS

Our parish continues to grow with a baby boy and girl added to our numbers during January. The baby boy - Zachariah - was born on January 17th, a first son for our parishioners Peter and Tania Iliuk, and a baby brother to Stephanie and Cyra. Zachariah was baptised by Father James at church on February 3rd. Zachariah's godparents are Dmitri Iliuk and Sonia Vasiliev. Baby Zachariah was brought to church to receive Holy Communion for the first time on Sunday February 4th. Our warmest congratulations to Peter and Tania and their family, and to godparents Dmitri and Sonia!

The baby girl - Melanie - was born on January 28th, and is a first daughter for our parishioners Victor and Susie Bendeovski and a baby sister to Phillip. Melanie was baptised on February 17th, and her godparents are Marina Shahmatov and Dmitri Savitsky. God willing, baby Melanie will receive Holy Communion for the first time on Sunday February 18th. Once again, our warmest congratulations to Victor and Susie and their family, and to godparents Marina and Dmitri!

PARISH LIFE: PARISH COUNCIL NEWS

The first meeting of the Parish Council for 2007 was held on Tuesday February 5th. Father James reported to the Parish Council on a number of issues in parish and diocesan life, some of which are reported in this newsletter: parish educational activities, disturbances in diocesan life, and the new schedule of services. He sought and obtained the agreement of the Parish Council for the purchase of a smaller chalice for use at Divine Services, an English-language Gospel book, and a Paschal candle-holder for use at the Easter services. Plans for a fundraising concert to be held at the Russian Club late in April were also discussed. In view of various difficulties, it was agreed that this concert be postponed until a more suitable time. The importance of charitable work, both within the church community and within the local community, was raised, and Paul Pereboeff agreed to co-ordinate this work on behalf of the parish. Some legal issues were discussed, as were plans for a Lenten BBQ on March 18th, the 4th Sunday in Great Lent. The Parish Council is due to meet next on Tuesday March 6th.

PARISH LIFE: FOURTH ANNUAL FISHING COMPETITION

The parish's fourth Annual Fishing Competition was held on Saturday February 10th. Organised by Paul Pereboeff and Victor Bendevski, the competition was once again a success, with over 70 people participating. As in previous years, the event was held at Deerubbin Reserve, Bar Point, on the Hawkesbury River. Previously a "boys only" event, this year ladies and children participated, a successful change that is likely to be a feature of the event in future. Over \$2300 was raised on the day. The funds will be used both for parish needs and for charitable works. The overall winner was George Gousev with a 0.68kg jewfish. George's name will be put on the perpetual trophy and he also received a trophy to take home. The general prize-winners were as follows:

Bream

Paul Morozoff 0.54kg

Chiara Dibiasi 0.33kg

Flathead

Michael Shahmatov 0.37kg

Julian Paramonov 0.34kg

Jewfish

George Gousev 0.68kg

Other Fish

George Portelli: Hammerhead shark

The new kid's category (Under 16) was won by Julian Paramonov with his 0.34kg flathead. Lucky door prizes were won by George Karmadonoff, Tahlia Dibiasi and Nick Ostin. Mila Shevlikov won the first prize in a raffle, with a further 19 (!) smaller raffle prizes given.

Prizes were donated by Otto's Tackle World, Drummoyne; Chucky's Pro Tackle, Long Jetty; Amart All Sport, Tuggerah and Erina; Alec Pereboeff; Sam Shatrov; and Pure Fishing Australia. Many thanks to the organizers, sponsors and competitors for making this fundraising event so enjoyable and successful. Details of prizewinners and sponsors will be posted on our parish website shortly.

PARISH LIFE: RUSSIAN SCHOOL & PARISH EDUCATION

A change in parish life this year concerns the activity of our Russian School. Our parish school of Saint Innocent of Alaska began lessons early in 2005 with 8 students from 5 families. 6 students from 2 families attended in 2006. Although following the same basic pattern as traditional church schools - Saturday morning lessons, Russian language and culture, religious instruction - our school employed an interesting and contemporary approach to teaching. Concerts at the end of 2005 and 2006 were well-received. The small numbers of students, the difference in skill levels and in ages, and various other commitments have made the operation of the parish school a challenge, however, and so we have decided that there will be no Saturday-morning Russian school in 2007. We are very grateful to Irene Kouznetsov for her work in our parish school during 2005-2006. Irene put together an excellent curriculum that worked well with students of diverse ages and skill levels, and we hope that she will continue to play a role in Russian-language education within the community. We will now take the opportunity to think about the range of educational needs in the parish - for both children and adults - and the most appropriate way of addressing these needs. Interestingly, a number of families within the broader Russian Orthodox community are seeking alternatives to the traditional Russian School model, with private Russian-language tuition increasingly a popular option. This leaves parishes with the responsibility of delivering education that is primarily religious, as opposed to cultural and linguistic, in focus. Ideas canvassed so far in this regard include a "Sunday School" for the smaller children that will provide religious education during a part of the Sunday morning service. Father James plans to convene a meeting of the younger families to discuss some of these issues over the next month or so.

PARISH LIFE: UNDERTAKING CHARITABLE WORK

At the first meeting of the Parish Council this year, the importance of charitable work was once again discussed. It was agreed that the parish would begin to undertake work to assist others within the Church as well as within the broader local community. Within

the Church, this might include raising money for needy parishes or missions, orphanages and schools. Within the local community, it might include assisting nursing homes, hospitals and schools, preparing Easter and Christmas hampers for the needy or those in custody, or assisting individuals in circumstances of particular need. We also discussed the possibility of "directed" charitable projects during each fasting period. As mentioned earlier in this newsletter, Paul Pereboeff has undertaken the coordination of this work, and more information will be forthcoming shortly. Anyone with ideas or suggestions should feel free to raise them with either Paul or Father James.

PARISH LIFE: A NEW SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

A new Schedule of Services, covering the Autumn months (March-May), will be available in church from Sunday February 18th. Noteworthy services include the solemn service of Great Compline on Wednesday evenings during Great Lent, vigil and Divine Liturgy for Palm Sunday, the beautiful Matins services on the evenings of Holy Week, and the combined observance this year of Great and Holy Saturday and the feast of the Annunciation. Father James will serve in Wallsend for Easter this year, and so an early (7.00pm) Easter Matins will be held at Gosford as in previous years. One omission from this year's Lenten schedule is the General Service of Anointing («Соборование»). We still plan to have this service, but have left it unscheduled at this stage to allow Vladyka Hilarion (and, God willing, other clergy) to attend. Planning in this regard has been complicated by the fact that Vladyka is already serving at 14 General Services of Anointing in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and in NZ between March 1st and April 4th! All parishioners will be notified when a date for this service has been set.

SAD NEWS

Sadly, we learnt during January of the repose of two friends of the parish. The first was Olga Timohina, the elderly mother of Olga Petroff. Mrs Timohina had been ill a number of years and was residing in the Saint Sergius aged care facility at Cabramatta prior to her repose. Services on the first and ninth day were held at Gosford; the funeral was served at Cabramatta by Father James. Mrs Timohina was 96 years old when she passed away on January 24th. Our heartfelt condolences go to Olga and Nestor and their daughter Svetlana. May God grant rest to His newly-departed servant, Olga!

The second was Victor Pulkownik, a resident of Umina Beach. A letter was received from Victor's estate late in January advising that he has reposed suddenly nearly 5 months earlier, on 6 September 2006. Victor had visited our parish a number of times over the years and was also an enthusiastic reader of the parish newsletter, going so far as to regularly send address labels and stamps to ensure that he received it! News of

his repose was a great shock, especially so long after the fact, and we pray that God will grant him rest.

DIOCESAN LIFE: AN AWARD, AN ORDINATION AND A TONSURE AT CROYDON

On the January 8th, the second day of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, it is customary for Archbishop Hilarion to preside at Divine Liturgy in his chapel, the church of All Saints of Russia in Croydon. The festivities this year were all the more joyful as Archpriest Michael Li, the senior priest of the Diocese by ordination and a cleric of the Croydon church, was awarded the right to wear the mitre, the headcovering customarily worn by bishops during the Divine Liturgy. Such an award is one of the highest given to a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church, and was given in this case in recognition of Father Michael's long and zealous pastoral service to the Church of Christ. All present - and all who learned of the award afterwards - rejoiced, rightly discerning in Father Michael a clergyman of extraordinary steadfastness and zeal. Father Michael suffered grievously at the hands of the godless regime in China for many years for his faith, and yet remains an example of patience, humility and kindness. Father Michael served our community here in Gosford back in the days at Narara Community Centre. We congratulate Father Michael on his award, and pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will continue to bless him as he serves His Holy Orthodox Church.

On February 15th, the feast of the Meeting of the Lord («Сретение Господне»), long-serving Subdeacon Dr Constantine Moshegov, a well-known Sydney eye specialist, was ordained to the diaconate. The new Father Constantine will continue to serve at Croydon. On the same day, Father Constantine's brother-in-law Martin Naef was tonsured reader and then sub-deacon, also to serve at the Croydon parish. Our warmest congratulations and best wishes to Father Constantine, Matushka Natalia, and their children Sophia and Julian, and to Subdeacon Martin, his wife Tatiana, and their children Xenia, Alexander and Sebastian. May God grant Deacon Constantine and Subdeacon Martin many years of service to his Holy Orthodox Church!

DISTURBANCES IN DIOCESAN LIFE

Readers of the Russian-language Diocesan journal, «Церковное Слово» ("Word of the Church") will be aware that the long-serving rector of the parish of Saint Seraphim in Brisbane, Mitred Archpriest Peter Semovskih, has been suspended by the church authorities from his duties at the parish and from all priestly functions. The reason given for this suspension was that Father Peter had of his own will separated himself from his lawful ecclesiastical authorities. Sadly, notices now appearing in the Church and Russian community press indicate that similar suspensions have been placed on three Sydney clergymen, Mitred Archpriest John Stukacz (Saints Peter & Paul Cathedral,

Strathfield), Archpriest Michael Konstantinoff (Archangel Michael parish, Blacktown), and Priest Vladimir Tsukanov (Our Lady of Kazan Convent, Kentlyn). The faithful are obliged to observe these suspensions, and should pray that these clergymen repent of their actions and submit to lawful church authority.

It is also with great sadness that we note that a Ukrainian-based group styling itself the "Russian True Orthodox Church" (RTOC) has begun to exercise an unhealthy influence upon some of the faithful here in Australia. The leader of this group is a certain Tikhon Pascechnik, consecrated to the episcopate unlawfully and against the will of Metropolitan Vitaly in late 2004. Although it claims links with parts of the Soviet-era Catacomb Church, the RTOC is in fact increasingly composed of suspended and deposed clerics from Western Europe, North America and Australia. The faithful should avoid all contact with this organisation.

THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL ARE ASKED FOR:

The sick & suffering: Deacon Christopher; our parishioners Antonina (Tialshinsky) & Victor (Manjetny); and also for Volodymyr, Vasili, Vera, Eugenia, Olga, Galina, Tatiana and Daniel

Expectant mothers: Alison (non-Orthodox)

Families with new babies: Tanya & Peter Iliuk and their new baby Zachariah, with big sisters Stephanida & Cyra; Susie & Victor Bendeovski and their new baby Melanie, with big brother Phillip

Newly-departed: Olga (Timohina, Olga Petroff's mother, who reposed on 24.1.2007)

Departed: Metropolitan Vitaly, Irina (Kamenev), Nun Maria, George, Theodore, Lyubov (Smieska); Victor (Pulkownik)

GOSFORD TELEPHONE NUMBER NOW DISCONNECTED

When we first moved to West Gosford we had a telephone line connected that linked to a "Messagebank" service. This service has been rarely - if ever - used, and the Parish Council has decided to save \$40.00 a month by disconnecting the service. As of the beginning of March, then, the telephone number 4322-9099 will no longer be in use.

Father James can be contacted on his mobile (0428-639156), at home (4342-0015), or by email: rev.james.carles@rocor.org.au. A list of names and contact numbers for members of the Parish Council will be included in the next issue of the newsletter.

NEW-LOOK DIOCESAN WEBSITE

The website of the Australian-New Zealand Diocese, www.rocor.org.au, has recently been completely re-designed and updated. The result is an attractive new website with lots of news and photographs from around the Diocese. Father James will be providing information to the Diocesan site about parish life here in Gosford.

SPIRITUAL LIFE: FASTING DURING GREAT LENT

"When we choose to observe the Fast, we always profit from it. For the devils dare not attack us when we fast, and the guardian angels that protect our life stand at our side with greater eagerness when we are cleansed with fasting".

(Sticheron at Vespers on Monday in Cheese Week)

Fasting is not something that we do because God wants us to be hungry or because he wants us to be punished. Fasting is a way of learning to control ourselves. It is easier to control our stomachs than our hearts and minds, so we practice self-control on our stomachs. We do this by eating very plain food.

Throughout the fast, a vegan diet is kept; no meat, fish, or dairy products should be eaten. The two general exceptions are the Great Feasts of Palm Sunday and Annunciation («Благовещение»). In 2007, these feasts fall on Sunday April 1st and Saturday April 7th respectively. Fish may be eaten on Palm Sunday, but because the feast of the Annunciation coincides with Great and Holy Saturday, that day remains one of strict fasting (wine is permitted, but not oil). Strictly speaking, no wine (to be understood as any alcoholic drinks) or oil are allowed on weekdays. The fast is relaxed on weekends and certain weekdays (in 2006, on Friday March 9th, Wednesday March 21st, Thursday March 22nd, and Thursday April 6th) to allow wine and oil. These rules are rigorous and certainly go well beyond the popular idea of "giving something up for Lent". Although hard, it is not impossible to keep such a fast; vegan cookbooks are now widely available, and supermarkets commonly stock many Lenten foods. There are many personal and practical circumstances that may make strict observance of the fast difficult, however, and these need to be taken into account. Anyone with questions or concerns about fasting should talk to Father James.

As well as eating only simple food, we also try and spend less time doing pointless things, like playing computer games or surfing the internet or watching TV. We try and spend our time in a way that is good for our souls. Reading the Bible or spiritual books, helping others, and going to church are some ways that we can do this. Ask others about books that may be profitable to read, should you not be sure or have anything suitable yourself.

Fasting can be very difficult. Sometimes we get tired of it and wish we could eat whatever we want to. Sometimes we get cranky. This shows us what we are really like inside: impatient, greedy, and not even thankful for the food we have. It shows how much we are slaves to our tastebuds and stomachs! It also shows us where we need to make a special effort. And ultimately, it shows us how much we need God's forgiveness and help.

DIOCESAN LIFE: CLERGY RETREAT AND PASTORAL CONFERENCE

On Tuesday & Wednesday 13th & 14th March, the annual Diocesan Clergy Retreat and Pastoral Conference will take place in Sydney. Priests and deacons from throughout the diocese gather to confess, serve together, & discuss pastoral issues. A number of the clergy form a choir for the services and sing beautifully. As has been the custom over the years, the retreat will be held in Sydney. Matins will be served in Croydon at 6.00pm on the Tuesday, preceded by the Reading of the Rule before Holy Communion. Hierarchical Presanctified Liturgy will then be served at Strathfield on the Wednesday, beginning at 8am. This is a wonderful service to be present at, as one rarely sees so many clergy serving together, and especially at the Presanctified Liturgy, served for the most part only on Wednesdays & Fridays during Great Lent. All the faithful are welcome to attend the Liturgy, although the lectures afterwards are reserved only for the clergy.

SPIRITUAL LIFE: FROM THE LENTEN SERVICE BOOKS

"Before Christ's death upon the saving Cross, sin ruled supreme and ungodliness prevailed. Men were counted blessed because of sensual pleasures, and only a few despised the appetites of the flesh. But once the mystery of the Cross was brought to pass, the tyranny of the demons was quenched by the knowledge of God, and heavenly virtues came to dwell upon the earth. So fasting now is held in honour, abstinence is glorified, and prayer is offered up. As a testimony to these things, the present season has been given to us by the crucified Christ our God, for the salvation of our souls".

(Sticheron at Matins on Friday in Cheese Week)

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Our parish newsletter is published monthly. If you wish to receive it by post or email, please talk to Father James (0428-639156) or Katya Marcotrigiano, the parish secretary (4369-1765).