

Go therefore and make disciples of
all nations
Mt 28:19



Allez, faites de toutes les nations
des disciples
Mt 28:19

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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Baptism and creation : Second 'Group of Twelve' studies Theophany

On August 1, 2007, on the first day of the Dormition Fast, a group of young adults arrived in Wells Gray National Park to begin the second in a series of twelve annual outdoor adventures. The "Group of Twelve," led by Fr John Hainsworth, is an event involving (at most) twelve Orthodox Christian young adults who spend a week in the wilderness, living together and exploring (at least) five wonderful sources of Divine Revelation: one of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Scriptures, Creation, Liturgy, and Life in Community. Last year, the Group of Twelve climbed to the summit of Battle Mountain and studied the Feast of the Transfiguration. The focus of this year (2007) was to study the Feast of Theophany while hiking and canoeing in the backwoods and backwaters of God's creation.



" . . . that we may present the whole earth to God as a holy and unblemished offering."

Our original plan

The night before we were to begin our trek, this year's participants, eight in total, met at Clearwater Lake campground. Fr John reviewed the icons that had been brought, and it appeared that a number of them were of St Nicholas who, fittingly, is the patron saint of sailors. From that moment, our little "parish" of eight was under the protection of St Nicholas.

The route we had charted on the topographical map required us to charter a water taxi, which would deposit us at the north end of Clearwater Lake. Our plan was to hike approximately thirteen kilometres along overgrown

trails, over hills and valleys, through bear country, until we reached the southern shore of Hobson Lake, where the canoes we had rented would be waiting. The goal was to make camp the first night on the shore of Hobson Lake. The next morning we would strike out in our canoes and explore the lake to find a suitable campsite for the rest of the week. From this home base, we would make short day trips every morning and would conduct seminars in the evening on the topic of the Theophany. On the second-to-last day, we would hike back to Clearwater Lake and meet our water taxi, and then we would spend the next morning having breakfast in the town of Clearwater and saying our goodbyes.

But here is what really happened

The hike to Hobson Lake, which according to the signs at the trailhead was to have taken five hours, took us fourteen hours to complete. Contrary to best-laid plans, we were not able to complete the trek in one day and as such, had to make emergency camp on the first night in the middle of the forest. The land was rough and unkind; it bruised us with fallen logs and lashed us with thorns; its contours taxed our endurance to the limit. The trail led us through gorgeous old growth forest, up steep inclines, across wild meadow patches and finally, to the banks of Licksillet Creek. The creek's bridge had been washed out years earlier

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and we had no choice but to forge across the glacial creek with full packs on our backs.

By the end of that first day we had been on the trail for ten hours and many of us were, physically at least, ready to go home. The weakest among us received support, encouragement, and help from the others, but all eight of us had to give 100% of our energy and prayers to make it through the day. As Fr John put it, "Last year's hike was a cakewalk compared to this." The caravan was buoyed up by prayers and spirited singing on the trails until, at last, we found a "campsite" in the middle of the forest. To make camp, we split into groups charged with purifying water, or hanging food out of bears' reach, or digging a fire pit, all of which had to be done before dark fell. That first evening we pitched our tents in the foliage and tried to ignore the many roots and twigs lying underneath our bedding, upon which we promptly collapsed. We slept fitfully, all the while dreaming of bears' breaking into the 300 pounds of food and cookware we had hung from a nearby tree. There were no seminars that evening.

The next day

With the sun shining through the trees, we awoke to a beautiful morning and enjoyed our breakfast. We broke camp, reattached packs to our backs, and continued hiking. Within an hour we reached the outskirts of "the burn," an area of forest devastated by forest fire years earlier. We moved through a pastiche of blackened logs and gorgeous purple meadow flowers while in the distance a thunder and lightening storm rumbled. By the time we cleared the burn, many of us had started to wonder if Hobson Lake even existed. Nevertheless, a few short hours later, the rear of the pack heard the gladsome cry, "Lake!" from the front. We quickly located, untied, loaded, and boarded the canoes, and set off across the turquoise lake in search of a home for the rest of the week. After about twenty minutes of paddling (such a relief to paddle! ah, happiness!), we landed at a sandy outcropping with much rejoicing.

We started to set up tents, clear for a fire pit, and dig our "toilet" when one of us discovered that her tent had fallen off her pack somewhere on the trail. Sleeping arrangements were then shuffled, and the "boys" and "girls" tents became cozy as we packed ourselves in like

sardines. The remains of the day were spent lounging around on the beach, cooking and consuming dinner, and conducting the first seminar around a glowing fire in the twilight. We heard a reading from Bulgakov's *Friend of the Bridegroom* and discussed the ministry of St John the Baptist.

The day after that

The goal of day three was to scout out a location for our chapel and to build an altar. We discovered, conveniently, that directly across the lake from our campsite was another small section of white beach. We paddled over and discovered that this piece of beach was the perfect size for our "parish" of eight, so we immediately started the process of building the chapel, using materials we had scavenged from



Annika Eriksson of Edmonton in the forefront as the group treks through rough country.

the beach and surrounding areas : stones, logs, rope and a small bit of duct tape. These were used to create the liturgical items necessary : a cross, which we mounted into the sand, an altar, and a censer. Upon our completion of the chapel, Fr John led us in the service of the blessing of the waters. We then headed out onto the lake to canoe its boundaries and explore the creation that was, for that week, ours alone.

The seminars that day covered the Orthodox understanding of baptism as taught in the Scriptures and revealed in the liturgical practices and texts of the early church. The symbolism of water, of course, was talked about continually as the symbol of the new birth into the new man, Jesus Christ. Basking in the glory of the lake, we sensed the power of water as a life-giving, binding metaphor.

The Day of the Lord

While the Sunday morning sun crept towards the crest of the mountain, eight well-rested and excited travellers paddled across the lake to begin the Divine Liturgy. At the moment the words "Blessed is our God" were proclaimed, the sun rose from behind the mountains, casting the shadow of the hand-built cross upon the altar. The service was, to put it mildly, achingly beautiful.

After the Liturgy and breakfast, five of our party set out to complete a day hike on a neighbouring

mountain, while the remaining three spent the morning on the lake. A few short hours later, a thunder and lightning storm swept down the mountain pass and across the lake. The party at camp secured the belongings, kept everything as dry as possible, and retreated into the tents to wait out the storm, praying for safe passage for the hikers. The appointed time of return for the five came and went, with no sign of them. Two people headed off down the lake in search, while one stayed at camp to get a fire going with what remained of our wet wood. Eventually, the five arrived back at camp, wet, hungry, frightened, and a few so cold that they were bordering on hypothermia. Soup was cooked, dry clothes passed around, and the five found warmth in their sleeping bags. Soon, stories emerged of the intense trials that they had faced while on the mountain : swamps, hail, signs of bears close by, panic. Through the telling of these stories, it became even clearer to us all that the Lord was watching over us each moment to ensure our safety, declare His presence, and increase our faith. There were no seminars that night. We slept well.

The day that was second last

The following morning we broke camp, packed up our belongings, and paddled across the lake to our chapel for the final time. We sang the akathist “Glory to God for All Things,” a series of hymns that magnify the presence of God in all creation and all events. Given the events of the past week, the timeliness of this service was clear to us all. At the close of the service, we dismantled the chapel, leaving only the cross standing as a beacon to future travellers. We headed back to the end of Hobson Lake to tie up the canoes and commence the gruelling hike back to Clearwater Lake.

Going back was, surprisingly, much easier than coming in. We reasoned that this was because we now knew to avoid the snares of Devil’s Claw; because we knew now of the best method of climbing over the large obstacles in our path; and because now the trail we had beaten was so clearly visible. By the time night fell, we had gained Licksillet Creek, and we made camp on the other side in the midst of a wild blueberry patch. Fear of bears was high as there had been no campfire smoke to deter them and, as we soon realized from the droppings, we had made camp in the middle of a bear’s “snack bar”!

The day that was the last

The night, however, passed without incident. Morning dawned and we readdressed the trail to complete the final stretch leading back to civilization. The hike went rather smoothly, and we greeted the shores of Clearwater Lake with joy! We collapsed on the beach, had our lunch, and began our seminars while waiting for the water taxi.

The seminars that day were dedicated to the practical meaning of baptism in our contemporary lives. We discussed the problem of how to maintain our baptismal identity in a culture that works to reshape us in conformity with its secular patterns. We talked about the difficulties of life in the baptismal community, which we had certainly experienced throughout the trials of the week. We wrapped up our discussion by talking about life in the world as baptized persons, and the need for us to form a baptismal cosmology through which we see the world as a sacramental gift. We concluded that this cosmology requires us to be good

stewards of the environment, but not for the sake of conservation itself. Rather, stewardship is part of our liturgical task as priests of God, that we may present the whole earth to God as a holy and unblemished offering.

Throughout the course of the day, we carried with us what Fr Schmemmann once called “a bright sadness.” Despite all that we had been through – the physical pain, the extreme weather, the fear, and the cold nights – we were all, in a sense, feeling more alive and joyous than ever, yet mourning the end of this glorious trip. We spent that night camped in the Clearwater Lake campground, staying up late, drinking hot chocolate, talking, and doing our best to make the most of the last precious hours of the last night.

The following morning we drove into the town of Clearwater for a huge breakfast and, afterwards, said our final goodbyes. With sad but full hearts we got into our cars and headed back to the lives we had all left behind a week before. We had gone to the wilderness to experience the creation of God, and we had come back having been baptized in it, never to be the same. — *Matthew Davidson (All Saints, Victoria BC) and Muryn Jordan (St Herman’s Langley BC)*



Megan Tokaruk of Regina fords a stream.

Building a youth programme In any parish

A recent article in the *New York Times* describes an emerging social phenomenon that scholars are now calling “emerging adulthood.” Occurring between the ages of 18 and 30, this is a time of life when marriage and parenthood are often delayed, formal schooling is prolonged, job switching is frequent and parental support is extended. In general, emerging adults in today’s society demonstrate generally weaker links with most social institutions, including the Church.

Of course, such a tendency has always existed. Many of us have no doubt seen our young people drift away from Orthodoxy, and from Christian faith entirely when they reach the age of majority, only to return when they marry and have children. The recent sociological findings, however, show that the period of time before marriage and parenthood has now grown to as much as fifteen years, making the chances of a young person’s return to their nurtured faith less and less likely.

Now more than ever we are faced with the urgent necessity of rooting our young people in their Orthodox Christian faith long before they set out on the secular path of “self-discovery,” which too often means little more than self-destruction. No more can we simply shrug our shoulders and wait for them to request a marriage service or a baptism for their children; given our current social climate, such requests may never come. If we are going to have a church that does not merely survive and endure on the fading strength of an older generation, but rather one that thrives and grows, we must strive to give our youth the tools by which they can make the transition into mature physical, emotional and spiritual adulthood.

Experience has shown us how to do this: by building programmes specifically for youth in our church communities. We must carefully, deliberately and prayerfully plan times of worship, fellowship and good works when our young people can gather *as* a youth community, when they can interact, form bonds of friendship, acquire memories, be instructed and so prepare for their long and arduous journey into the spiritual and cultural wasteland that awaits them.

How do we go about building a youth programme in our communities? The remainder of this article, aimed at the leaders in our Orthodox communities, provides four concrete steps that will help us make a start towards securing the future Christian faith of our “emerging adults.”

Step 1: Call for leaders

Do not assume that because no one came forward before, that no one will do so now. Call for volunteers to lead a youth group. Even if your church has no more than two or three young people, actively search for a leader. If volunteers are not forthcoming, seek out and encourage people whom you believe will make good youth leaders. The qualities of a good leader are a love for young people, enthusiasm and energy. To this end, the ideal youth leaders are young married couples who do not yet have children.

If such couples cannot to be found, seek two people, a man and woman of good standing in the community. If you can find only one person, then try to find someone of the opposite sex to assist him or her. Either way, it is important to have members of both sexes in positions of leadership, as healthy spiritual role models for both boys and girls. Finally, it is important that volunteers to lead a youth group understand that they are committing to plan and attend all youth events. No one can substitute for the youth leaders on a regular basis. A rotation of leaders aimed at easing the time commitment involved simply does not work. Youth leaders must be consistently committed, present and visible to both the youth and their parents. Without this first crucial step of visible consistent leadership, a youth programme cannot succeed no matter how many youth the community may have, or how well-intentioned their parents may be.

Step 2: Assemble the youth

Once a leader has been found and appointed with the blessing of the priest, it is time to assemble the youth. At the beginning of the school year, call a meeting in an informal setting (preferably in someone’s home). The priest should be present at this meeting to extend the blessing of the Church to the new group. Begin with prayer and then an “ice-breaker” activity so that everyone can get to know one another (suggestions for ice-breakers are available on the internet), followed by some snacks and fellowship time. Call the group to order and announce your intention to determine two things: a) What activities they would like to do and b) How often they would like to meet. Allow the discussion to proceed freely, taking notes as it goes. Listen respectfully to all suggestions, no matter how impractical or flippant. As discussion continues, guide the choice of activities in such a way as to have a balance between purely social events (going bowling, for example) and charitable activities (such as volunteering at a soup kitchen). Whatever the schedule you collectively decide on, be sure that the youth are able to sustain the

commitment for the entire duration of the school year (summers will be different). In determining the real level of commitment, you will also need to consult parents; after all, they do all the scheduling and driving for their children! Having established a schedule in principle, conclude the meeting by making concrete plans for the next event, including date and time. Before dispersing with a prayer, collect contact information from the youth so that a list can be compiled and communication maintained.

Step 3: Implement a regular youth teaching

In addition to social and charitable events, a regular spiritual teaching for the youth is essential to any youth programme. Again, schedules may vary according to the situation, but whatever the schedule, consistency is the key. The youth leader may lead the teachings, or someone else may be appointed with the blessing of the priest. In terms of content or format, many options are available. Formal curricula are available from the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (www.orthodoxed.org). Other possibilities include Bible studies, an invited speaker, topic discussions, Q&A times, or social events combined with discussions (such as seeing a movie and discussing the issues raised). Whatever decisions you make concerning the teachings, it is important to remember that the youth will appreciate the witness of the teacher far more than the actual content of the teaching. Many of us remember significant teachers in our lives, but who remembers the details of their subject matter? So it is with our youth. The most valuable education takes place when young people interact regularly with a dedicated Christian who cares for them and strives to answer their questions seriously and honestly. Rich Orthodox content is important, but personable teachers and witnesses to the faith are more important than the mere imparting of correct information.

Step 4: Explore pan-Orthodox connections

Supposing your community really does not have anyone under the age of fifty, or all your young people are under the age of five? Should you neglect the building of a youth programme? By no means! Waiting for young people to appear before building a youth programme is like waiting for a house to be constructed before laying its foundation. Even if you have no one in your parish between the ages of 12 and 18, youth leaders can still be appointed to get involved with other Orthodox churches where young people are present. In this regard, contact other canonical Orthodox churches and find out who is involved with their youth. Coordinate a meeting with those persons and work together in a spirit of consensus to plan regular youth events between churches, even if young people in *your* church do not participate. When (not *if*) youth come to your parish, they will at least

find one person who knows a forum where Orthodox young people gather on a regular basis, even if it is outside of this particular parish.

In short, every Orthodox community can and should make a start at building a programme for its young people. As stewards of God's creation, our responsibility is nowhere greater than towards those whom we have raised in the faith. There can truly be no greater witness to the power of the Gospel than when those who have arrived at the brink of young adulthood under our care, remain rooted in Christ, passionate in their love for Him and His Church. They have seen and know our weaknesses and sins up close and personal. If, even in spite of our failings towards them and others, they continue to proclaim what we have taught them, holding it fast to the shedding of their blood, what more can we hope for in this life? What else can we hope for, except that our youth would fulfil St Paul's injunction to Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity....Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress...for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Tim 4:12-16)

For more information or questions about starting a youth programme in your parish, please contact Fr Richard Rene, the Youth Director of the Archdiocese, at (403) 685-5840, or at rprene@gmail.com

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and other missionary labourers
of the Orthodox Church in America.*
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Pan-Orthodox Youth Meet to run 'amazing race'

On Saturday, 29 September 2007, forty-six Orthodox youth from four churches in Calgary gathered for a day of fun, fellowship and friendly competition as they ran "the Amazing Race" in Calgary. Assisting in the event were almost twenty staff members, all of whom volunteered from the various churches, working hard to ensure that the day was a time of enjoyment in which youth from different jurisdictions could interact and discover their common Orthodox Christian heritage.

The event, designed by Kevin Wigglesworth from St Peter the Aleut Church, was a Calgary version of the worldwide "Amazing Race" that has aired on television. Divided into teams of four, youth left the starting line at St Mary's Romanian Church at 10:00 a.m. and raced around the city, solving clues that would lead them to their next clue. The last clue directed them to the finish line at St Vladimir's Ukrainian Church by 5:00 p.m. Participating on the teams were youth from St. Peter's, St Vladimir's, St Mary's, as well as the Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation.

Following the event, the youth enjoyed pizza and a discussion about the race and its implications for their life as a community of young Christians. The day ended with Great Vespers concelebrated by Archpriest Taras Krochak of St Vladimir's and Priest Richard Rene of St Peter's.

The "Calgary Amazing Race" event is one of the most recent in a series of pan-Orthodox youth events to be held among the Calgary Orthodox churches. The initiative began in spring of 2006, when a group of volunteers from the various churches assembled to plan common youth events on a regular basis. Under the spiritual direction of Fr Richard, the group continues to meet on a regular basis, cooperating to plan and implement two social events and two teaching events a year. At the time of writing, the youth had just gathered again, this time for a day-long retreat entitled, "Be Still and Know that I am God." Other events have included picnic and games in the park and an evening of swimming at Southland Leisure Centre.

It is the hope that the pan-Orthodox youth movement in Calgary will provide inspiration for other cities and churches throughout Canada. Many Orthodox churches face the challenge of a lack of strong programmes for the youth, a fact which often results in poor youth involvement in the rest of Church life. But, as the volunteers in Calgary have discovered, with a few willing individuals and a Christian spirit of consensus,

it is more than possible to begin building a community of young people who pray, play and grow together, forging bonds of fellowship and friendship that will ensure their Christian unity and commitment for years to come.

— Fr Richard Rene, St Peter the Aleut's Church, Calgary, Youth Director of the Archdiocese of Canada

Pastoral Notes

On 1 Jan 07, the Chapel of the Hieromartyr Vladimir of Kyiv was moved from Halifax NS to Pinehurst-New Germany NS.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Archpriest Dennis Pihach** was released from his duties as Dean of Alberta.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Priest Wasyl Kolega** was assigned Dean of Alberta for three years.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Archpriest John Jillions** was released from his duties as Dean of Ontario, but he remains Dean of the Cathedral in Ottawa.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Archpriest Oleg Kirillov** was assigned Dean of Ontario for three years.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Archpriest Lawrence Farley** was assigned Dean of British Columbia for three years.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Archpriest Robert S Kennaugh** was assigned Dean of Manitoba-Saskatchewan for three years.

On 20 Jul 07, following the election by the Deanery Clergy, at the Archdiocesan Assembly, **Higoumène Irénée (Rochon)** was assigned Dean of Québec for three years.

On 1 Dec 07, **Deacon Kevin Miller** was released from his attachment to the Mission of the Holy Apostle Barnabas in Comox Valley BC, and assigned to All Saints and St Arseny's Church in Victoria BC.

On 6 Dec 07, **Priest Walter Smith** was assigned Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Moose Jaw SK, and also of Holy Trinity Church, Kayville SK.

On 23 Dec 07, **Subdeacon Glen Daniel Friesen** was ordained to the Holy Diaconate at St Herman of Alaska's Church in Edmonton AB, to which he is attached.

On 3 Jan 08, **Priest John Bingham** was released from his responsibility as Rector of St Nicholas' Church, Langley BC, and attached to St Herman of Alaska's Church, Langley BC. He remains Priest in Charge of St Nicholas of Zhicha Mission in Whitehorse YT, and he has responsibility for Missionary Supply in the BC Interior.

Pilgrimage to Mount Athos

As so often happens with a pilgrimage, one must be ready for all kinds of obstacles and changes of plans. This is not just because we are sinners, which is true, and our sinfulness sometimes impedes blessings. It is also because sometimes the Adversary sends obstacles to our intention of doing what is right and pleasing to the Lord. Often it is not at all easy to discern which is which. Therefore, it is important that we always call to the Lord, and to ask for the blessing, not just to assume it is there. And then doors may open in an expected manner, or there may be significant changes. Always giving thanks to the Lord, we must be ready to accept whatever comes to us, and to glorify Him, regardless, as we live under His protection, and that of the Theotokos. One hears frequently of this situation with Spruce Island in Alaska — that one cannot get there from Kodiak (or even on and off Kodiak Island itself) unless the weather permits. Often this is understood to include the blessing, or not, of St Herman. This is so elsewhere too, not just in maritime environments. Also, regardless of attempts to express the experience of a pilgrimage, no one can manage, really, to put this into words. One can only give a summary suggestion of the experience.

Our flight took us first to Athens, then to Thessalonika, where we arrived mid-Sunday afternoon. We knew we had only the “inside” of a week. Upon arrival, there was just time to find supper, because the eating-places were soon closing. We discovered that Thessalonika, clearly still a Christian city, has its shops closed on Sundays, and likely major holy days too.

I had hoped for many years to have the blessing of visiting the Holy Mountain, Mount Athos. In our days, when we think everything should happen automatically, according to our plans, still, the Lord has ways of showing us the correct perspective. And so, although we had arranged, according to the correct manner for approaching the Holy Mountain (even though our pilgrim-group of eight was larger than the usual maximum size of five), we began on our first morning to encounter the application of “man proposes, God

disposes.” We arose very early, but on arriving at the bus-station, we found that the bus we had expected to take us to Ouranopoli was cancelled. When we finally did arrive in this little village, we discovered, after some searching, the Pilgrimage Office. There, they had no record of us, although they eventually did issue the travel documents for the Holy Mountain, which is an autonomous Monastic Republic within Greece. Having received these, we were told that the weather was too poor for the boats to travel that day. Thus we had time to walk around the village, eat, talk, and rest. In the course of this, we encountered many Russian-speakers, to our surprise, as well as a bus of pilgrims from Moscow. We spent the night in a hotel, because there is no place available to help pilgrims in this situation. There, we met both Russian and Moldavian pilgrims. We also were given all sorts

of advice on how to maximise our experience of the monasteries during our short time on the Holy Mountain.

The next day, we rose, again very early, to take the 6:30 ferry. This time the weather was calm enough. The “slow” boat, which also carries vehicles, was one of several of different sizes that serve the monasteries; and it was loading with monks, various kinds of lay-workers, visitors, and tradesmen. Fast boats are also available, at a higher price. As the sun began to rise, we sailed away,

and we passed the next two hours in disembarkments at monasteries and sketes on the south side of the peninsula, ending our own part of the trip at Daphne, the main port. There a mini-bus met us by pre-arrangement, and with our Romanian driver from Karakallou, we began our journey on the Holy Mountain itself. Several of our intended stops were inaccessible because of construction. Therefore, our first stop was on the north shore, at Vatopedi, the parent monastery of our own Fr Pierre (Vachon), whom the older monks remembered well. Vatopedi is a regular visiting-place, by the way, of Prince Charles. We were very kindly received here, and guided.

This monastery has very ancient monastic roots, going back to the time of the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius, when it was civil territory. It has a large population, with a number of dependent sketes and cells. Then we were driven to Karyes, to St Andrew's Skete,

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The Athonite Pilgrimage group at Prophet Elias' Skete: l to r, a monk of St Elias, Mark Petasky, Zachary Katsilas, Fr Dennis Pihach, Alexander Svitsov, Vladyka Seraphim, Fr Anatoliy Melnyk, and Alexander Milochenko.

. . . . *continued from page 7:*

which is under reconstruction, although its buildings are nevertheless beautiful. This and other monastic buildings are often quite large, reflecting past large populations. Fr Ephrem, who greeted us here, reminded us that living in larger communities does not often work well with western, modern man, because we are so used to living to ourselves. He expressed the hope that future pilgrims from Canada would visit St Andrew's. He expressed the readiness of this community also to pray for people, if requests are sent. We also visited the Protaton, and the Icon "Axios estin," which has all kinds of scaffolding, inside, and out.

Karyes is a kind of centre for the Holy Mountain, often called its "capital," and there are some monastically-operated shops there. Then we proceeded to Pantocrator Monastery. Writing like this makes it seem like an easy operation. Not so. Historically, until recently, people went to the monasteries by foot, by boat, or by donkey. Now, with roads, vehicles of various sizes are more used; but the roads are very difficult, and some require special vehicles. In the monasteries' churches, we always met a monk who had enough English to tell us something about the monastery, and its wonder-working icons, and its relics. Sometimes, if the priests were available, we were able to venerate the holy relics that were not generally available to every visitor. Because of the long history of some monasteries, and their "proximity" to Constantinople and Thessalonika, there are many relics of well-known saints from early times.

After Pantokrator, we went to the Prophet Elias Skete nearby, then to Stavronikita, and finally to Iveron. There, we joined Vespers, Paraklesis (in the chapel of the Portaitissa Icon of the Theotokos), supper, and Compline (with Akathist). As we progressed, we also were informed about the inter-connected histories of these monasteries. This is so, even in these days. The renewal of these communities' life has been enabled by the movement of groups of monks from one community to another. In this case, Iveron was revived by the arrival of monks from Stavronikita. The communities are all repairing their buildings, and the spiritual life is now strong, and the monks are becoming again very numerous. Some communities, like Vatopedi, now number about 100 in the main community, and there are many more living in dependent communities. Iveron Monastery, which was founded by Georgians, is one of the oldest three monasteries. Its wonderworking Icon, the Portaitissa, is represented in Moscow in Red Square, in the Ivirsakaya Chapel, and this Icon is considered to be the protectress of the whole Holy Mountain. As was noted by one monk, although women are not allowed on the Holy Mountain,

it is a woman, the Mother of God, who is its Protectress, and who is the most significant personality of the whole peninsula. This monastery is also the home of the now-retired Archimandrite Vasilios, the writer whose works are being published by our Dr John Hadjinicolaou at Alexander Press in Montréal.

The next day, at 2:30 a.m., we joined the services of Midnight Hour, Matins, Hours, and Liturgy. It was the Feast of Sts Cosmas and Damian, and of Sts James, James, and Dionysius of Iveron. At the end of Matins, we venerated the relics of each of these saints. On ordinary days, and lesser feasts, Liturgies are in the chapels, not the main temple. Everything is served fully, in order, and peacefully. Nevertheless, we were told that as many as 200 persons per day visit this monastery, and ask to venerate the Icon of the Portaitissa. We were helped, later in the morning, to get to Karyes, where we had to take the large bus to Daphne, whence we were to take the boat to St Panteleimon.

Once we arrived, the monk in charge of guests gave us a short tour of the older main temple, built after 1812, after which he took us to the reception rooms for a cup of coffee, and showed us our rooms. Then we went to the upper, larger temple, built at the turn of the 20th Century to accommodate the 2,000 monks living at that time in this monastery. We venerated their many precious relics, which included those of the Forerunner, several Apostles, many other well-known saints, including all the Unmercenary Healers, St Panteleimon, some more recent saints canonised in Russia, and of course, the head of Saint Silouan. The present history of St Panteleimon is dated from the 19th Century, but it also has roots in other small communities on the same site, going back 900 years.

The clock of the monastery reminded us that the Holy Mountain operates on the old Christian time scheme, which followed that of the Scriptures: the day begins with sunset. There are twelve hours of the night, and twelve of the day, which are governed by the sunset. As a result, we were serving the Ninth Hour, and Vespers at what appeared to be 2:00 p.m., and Compline with Akathist at what appeared to be 5:00 p.m. At 8:00 p.m. Old Time (1:00 a.m. civil), we were beginning the Midnight Hour, followed by Matins, the three Hours, and Divine Liturgy. All of this was two hours later at Iveron, but the whole schedule is the same, and the general effect was one of an extra seven hours' time-difference from Montréal, and of that much more "jet-lag." After the end of Liturgy, there was a short rest, and then Trapeza (Refectory). After this, we were informed that the winds were too strong, and our boat would not arrive. So we had time to visit the Deputy

Abbot, to discuss how better to encourage visits from abroad. Next we visited the cemetery, and the Charnel-house Church of All Saints, where more than 2,000 heads of departed monks, with other bones, are resting. It was explained to us that the colour of the bones is one indication of sanctity, and that the three-year exhumation custom on the Holy Mountain is primarily because of the very poor and limited soil on the peninsula.

Then there was time for rest, before beginning again the schedule of services. We had already had the blessing of participating in two complete monastic cycles of worship, one in Greek, the second in Slavonic. None of us was, of course, used to such long periods in Church, even if we have plenty of experience otherwise. In the end, the winds did not subside, and so we were blessed with a third cycle of services. Early on the final morning, with the pooling of money, it was arranged that a small boat collect us specially, since the sea was moderate, but in danger of increasing activity. Autumn is a windy period here, with fast changes in weather. That we were able to accomplish this, we take to be thanks to the protection of the Mother of God, and the prayers of St Nicholas. We arrived in Ouranopoli via Daphne quickly, and then we went by minibus to Thessalonika (a cheaper option for many people, with several stops required — however there is really nothing inexpensive about travelling in Greece on the Euro).

Near Thessalonika, we stopped in at the Patriarchate of Constantinople's Monastery of St Anastasia (4th Century Great Virgin Martyr), and venerated her relics there (they were in a Thessalonika temple in the 4th Century). We also were able to venerate the relics of St Theonas, the 16th Century Archbishop of Thessalonika, whose uncorrupt body rests there. It was moving to see two women approaching the relics of St Theonas, by ascending the stairs to the temple on their hands-and-knees, and then moving the whole way through the church to the Iconostasis, at the south side of which is the reliquary.

We got to Thessalonika in mid-afternoon, and were greeted by heavy traffic. Construction of a subway contributed to the congestion. After arriving at our hotel, and taking a brief rest, we were collected again, and taken to venerate the aromatic relics of St Demetrios, the Great Martyr, in the Basilica dedicated to his memory. There we venerated also the relics of the Martyr Anysia of Thessalonika (298). We also venerated the relics of the Archbishop of Thessalonika, St Gregory Palamas, in the temple named for him. Then we visited the historic temple of Hagia Sophia, named for the Martyr Sophia, and her three children. In this temple, also, are the relics of the Archbishop of Thessalonika, St Basil Homologites, of the 10th Century. There were official visits that should

have been made, but they were impossible, because of our late arrival. Nevertheless, it was a very blessed day, blessed in ways we could not have expected — even though it was not according to plan.

I have always found that any plan made, regarding a pilgrimage in particular, has to be very flexible, because things are always changing. In this case, through our own Russian-speaking participants' simple conversations with people, the changes had also to do with the unexpected encounters with various Russian-speakers in every place, who seemed to be sent to help us at difficult points. They were on the spot at the needed moments, even if what they suggested often cost extra money. The Lord always knows how to care for us. The Mother of God is always taking care of us. The prayers of various saints are supporting us. In the end, we must rejoice in saying "God is with us"

Everywhere we visited, we were told that not very many pilgrims arrive from North America, and very few, indeed, from Canada. Instead, many come from former Soviet countries, and from Australia, Germany, Austria, and Britain. It is true that it is not an easy thing to make such a pilgrimage, and it is true that we have now many more monasteries close by in North America. It is true, also, that it is an expensive undertaking to travel in territory governed by the Euro. It is still worth trying to gather the resources, to make the connections as possible (even by computer), and to go. We have the resources in Canada to give suggestions as to how to go about this, and there is computer information on the Internet, as well. In our archdiocese, Dr John Hadjinicolaou can give a person suggestions, as can Frs Luke (Majoros) and Pierre (Vachon), and perhaps Fr Cyprian Hutcheon. If one is a clergyman, the travel requires getting specific permission from the Patriarch of Constantinople, and it requires a letter both from the diocesan bishop, and the bishop of the Greek Orthodox Diocese (in this case, Metropolitan Sotirios, the Patriarchal Exarch for Canada). Lay-persons can go for three nights, as a beginning, and perhaps then acquire an extension through the office in Karyes. As can be seen in these notes, there are also many other monasteries in the areas of Chalkidiki, and Macedonia, which can be visited in addition. Most important, it is better not to travel as we did, with a short time, and tight schedules ; but rather, with enough time on either side of the projected arrival and departure times, so that one can allow for weather, or possible extended stays. Again, the blessing is worth the expenditure. It is time for us in North America to start again visiting these places of refreshment and examples of the Christian way-of-life. Over fifty years ago, when travel was more difficult,

continued, p.10 . . .

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Canadian believers did take the trouble to make such pilgrimages, and to maintain contact with these monasteries. I remember encountering persons who did this. These communities are ready and willing to have

correspondence with us, and to pray for us. It is a spiritual struggle to make a pilgrimage, but the blessings that come are important, and the experience can help us to grow in Christ, to whom be glory unto the ages.

†Seraphim

Remembering the Celtic Orthodox faith: A Canadian's pilgrimage to Wales

On September 1, 2007, after spending four days on the Hebridean island of Tiree (where St Brendan and St Columba both established monasteries) I took a ferry from Rosslare, near Dublin, to join Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) and a group of about thirty pilgrims for a week at Ffald-y-Brenin (the King's Sheep-Fold), a retreat centre in the hills above the Gwaun valley near Fishguard.

Many of us had been on pilgrimages with Metropolitan Kallistos before, to Iona, to Donegal, to Durham and Lindisfarne, and now to a remote corner of Wales, where we were deeply moved by the many tangible signs of Christianity, from the sixth century until today. Within a fifty-kilometer radius we visited sites of early hermitages and holy wells, carved stone standing crosses and Ogham (early Irish) script, and



Shown are some of the pilgrims studying the 10th century cross at St Brynach's Church, Nevern : Gerry, Mother Nectaria, Johannes, Howard, and Deacon James



Metropolitan Kallistos blessing the pilgrims.

a monumental iron age burial place (Pentre Ifan, 3500 BC). The holy well at St David's birthplace, on high cliffs near the cathedral town of St David's, still flows with beautiful clear water. We served the Great Blessing of Waters at this spot (observed with interest by a few passing hikers), and Metropolitan Kallistos read from the Life of St David.

Another cliff site, at St Govan's, led down 68 steep steps to the chapel dating from the time of the holy hermit Govan (6th century) and still standing. We took a boat to Caldey Island where the first monastery was founded in the 6th century and where Cistercian monks now keep the memory of the early saints very much alive. The relics of St Samson of Dol (one of the first abbots of Caldey)

were brought out with great solemnity for us to venerate. Another early hermit was St Justinian, who lived on Ramsey Island. This island is now a bird sanctuary and we could not land, but we sailed round it and saw (besides sea birds, sheep - which our boatman jokingly called "woolly pigs," and seals) a cave which might well have been St Justinian's.

Cym Gwaun, the Gwaun valley, is sacred to the memory of St Brynach (who freed the village of Pontfaen from evil spirits), and the nearby Carn Ingli, or Hill of the Angels, is where he is said to have gone to pray and converse with angels. About half the pilgrims climbed this hill one fine morning (Alice was convinced that St Brynach helped us find the path to the top), and were rewarded by a magnificent view, giving thanks in a Moleben with a special troparion to the saint. During another visit to St David's Cathedral we served Orthodox Vespers, and then stayed for the regular daily Evensong which included some beautifully-sung hymns to the Virgin Mary, in honour of the approaching feast of her Nativity.



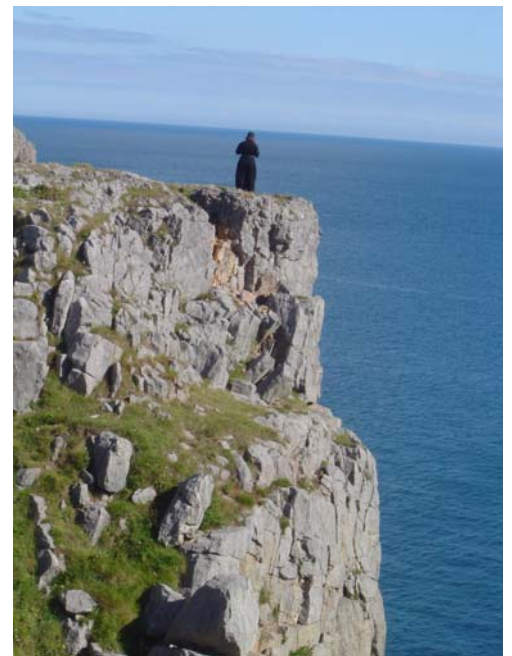
The pilgrims' chapel at the Ffald.

Morning and evening prayers, Sunday and feast-day Liturgies, shared meals, quiet times, walks (even a little sea bathing!) and lectures, rounded out the week. Dr Jonathan Wooding of the University of Wales at Lampeter, a specialist in early Celtic Christianity, spoke about the coming of Christianity to Wales; Metropolitan Kallistos, besides his striking homilies, gave two talks, one on the world of nature in Welsh spirituality, the other on the theological roots of the Celtic Christian love of nature, both richly illustrated by expressive readings of poems and prayers. One phrase I jotted down was "The stars are in us" (William Thomas). Hieromonk Nicanor from Khabarovsk in the Russian Far East gave a memorable account, with video, of his work with the youth and their "Hobbit Club," through which many have been brought to the faith.



The "modern" (13th century) roof of St Govan's Chapel can be seen from the 68 steps above.

Howard, a first-time pilgrim, writes that "to visit holy places together, to eat and converse and worship together, free of distraction . . . can there be a better way to spend time? No wonder so many of our ancestors were willing to risk so much by embarking on the road to St David's, or Santiago, or the Holy Land; such a recharge to one's spiritual batteries could power the rest of one's life." Howard writes of Wales "a small country where almost every hill and hollow has significance, as if the land were a sheet of Braille from which our story can be read." — Jane Szepesi, *Annunciation Cathedral, Ottawa*



Father Nicanor on the cliffs of St Govan's Head.

Notre Mère parmi les saintes :

Ste Juliana Lazarevskaia

Parmi les personnes vénérées comme saintes par le peuple de la Russie moscovite, on trouve aussi une dizaine de femmes, pour la plupart princesses ou religieuses, parfois les deux ensemble. C'est le cas de la princesse Anne Kachinskaïa dont la forte personnalité transparait dans le récit hagiographique de sa vie. Sur la plupart de ces saintes femmes, les renseignements précis font défaut. On sait peu de chose sur leur "exploit" spirituel et leur vie intérieure reste ignorée. Les moniales russes n'ont eu ni leur Catherine de Sienne, ni leur Thérèse d'Avila, ni même leur saint Basile pour écrire leur panégyrique, comme ce dernier le fit pour sa sœur Macrine. Cette indigence pourrait s'expliquer par le niveau généralement bas de la culture littéraire qui affectait les femmes encore plus que les hommes ; à quoi s'ajoute, comme le suggère G. Fedotov, "la condition humiliée de la femme" dans la Russie ancienne.

Une figure pourtant émerge de cette obscurité générale : Exceptionnelle, animée d'une charité héroïque, Juliana Lazarevskaïa incarne, portées à leur point culminant, les vertus de milliers de femmes chrétiennes russes que l'histoire a ignorées. Sa place dans l'hagiographie moscovite est unique. Ni princesse, ni fondatrice de monastère, elle est la seule à y figurer en tant que femme mariée, mère de nombreux enfants ; la seule aussi dont la biographie fort précise, nullement noyée dans une brume de légende dorée, ait été écrite par son propre fils. Rédigée en slavon d'église, ce texte dont les deux versions – l'une plus longue, l'autre abrégée – sont parvenues jusqu'à nous, s'écarte notablement du modèle stylisé de la "vie de saint" traditionnelle. Monument de piété filiale, l'œuvre de Droujina Ossorguine amorce l'art et la technique de la biographie moderne.

Née sous le règne du tsar Jean IV le Terrible qui servait son père, morte en 1604, au temps de Boris Godounov, Juliana appartenait à une famille de la moyenne noblesse, celle des serviteurs du Tsar que ce dernier récompense en leur donnant des terres. Sa vie, comme celle de beaucoup de femmes russes de cette époque, fut jalonnée d'épreuves. Orpheline de mère à six ans, elle est élevée dans la famille d'une tante, où la piété précoce et les tendances ascétiques le l'adolescente sont l'objet de moqueries, sinon de blâme. Quand elle a 16 ans, on la marie à Georges Ossorguine, un noble assez aisé de la région de Mourom. Elle en a treize enfants dont sept meurent en bas âge. Deux autres fils périssent de mort violente, l'un à la guerre, l'autre au cours d'une rixe où il est tué par un de ses serfs. Occupé au service

du Tsar, le mari est presque toujours absent. Juliana dirige la maison et l'exploitation agricole, d'abord sous la tutelle de ses beaux-parents auxquels elle est humblement soumise, puis seule après leur mort.



Ste Juliana

Les temps et les gens sont durs. Juliana doit faire face aux disputes qui opposent entre eux ses enfants et les domestiques, en même temps qu'à la famine et aux épidémies qui ravagent la Russie. Alors que les nobles, ses voisins, stockent leurs récoltes pour bénéficier de la hausse des prix dûes à la pénurie, la jeune femme ouvre ses greniers et nourrit les affamés. Elle ira jusqu'à vendre ses propres vêtements pour acheter la nourriture des pauvres. Bravant le risque de contagion, elle soigne elle-même les malades et ensevelit les morts. Devenue veuve, elle partage entre ses enfants le domaine familial de Lazarevo et s'en va vivre dans un autre village. Survient alors une nouvelle famine. Ayant distribué tout ce qu'elle possède, Juliana tombe dans le plus grand dénuement. Elle prend alors la décision de libérer ses serfs en leur laissant le choix soit de s'en aller pour chercher ailleurs leur subsistance, soit de demeurer auprès d'elle. Ceux qui restent sont nourris par elle d'un pain fait avec une herbe nommée *lébéda* et d'écorces d'arbre finement moulues. Miraculeusement (ou peut-être aussi grâce à son talent) ce pain est d'un goût excellent.

Tombée malade en décembre 1605, Juliana meurt au mois de janvier suivant. On l'ensevelit dans l'église de Saint-Lazare au village de Lazarevo. Dix ans plus tard, quand meurt son fils Droujina, auteur de sa biographie, Juliana est déjà en odeur de sainteté parmi les gens du pays de Mourom. Cette vénération locale spontanée sera officialisée au XIXe siècle sans qu'il y ait une véritable canonisation. Une icône que l'on dit "miraculeuse" représente Juliana debout devant le Christ qui, d'une main la bénit, alors que l'autre tient le livre des Évangiles¹.

L'important est le message qui se dégage de cette vie et que le biographe, très consciemment – semble-t-il – s'est efforcé de transmettre. Au dire de son fils, homme pour son époque d'une culture au-dessus de la moyenne, Juliana n'a reçu aucune formation ni religieuse ni littéraire. Comme beaucoup de femmes de son milieu, elle était presque analphabète. Durant son enfance et son adolescence, on néglige même de la conduire régulièrement à l'église. Mais, souligne son biographe, "son sens intérieur lui apprend tout sans qu'elle ait besoin de lire des livres". En fait, on trouve chez elle tous les traits qui caractérisent l'évangélisme russe traditionnel : humilité, douceur, compassion, aspiration au dépouillement de soi poussée aux extrêmes limites. Vers la fin de sa vie, ayant tout donné, elle est si pauvre qu'elle ne peut plus ou n'ose plus se rendre à l'église distante de quelques verstes de son domicile. À cela s'ajoute un sens aigu – nouveau et exceptionnel dans son milieu – de la dignité de tout être humain. Son fils note qu'elle s'adresse toujours à ses serviteurs en les nommant de leur nom suivi du patronyme (ce qui est une formule de politesse équivalent au "Monsieur" ou "Madame" de la langue française). Ne les réprimandant jamais durement ou grossièrement, elle voit en eux des êtres capables de prendre librement une décision : par exemple, de la quitter ou de rester avec elle au temps de la famine.

Les historiens soviétiques qui se sont penchés sur la "Vie" de Juliana ont cru y discerner des traits d'anticléricisme et une attitude critique à l'égard du monachisme. Il est exact qu'à plusieurs époques de sa vie Juliana semble avoir peu fréquenté le culte public : fait qui étonne, voire scandalise le clergé paroissial et que Droujina croit nécessaire d'expliquer en donnant des raisons plausibles et en invoquant une justification surnaturelle. Ainsi la prêtre qui se pose des questions au sujet de l'absence de Juliana, en priant devant l'icône de saint Nicolas, entend une voix qui lui commande de se rendre auprès d'elle et de se prosterner devant elle pour lui demander pardon. Peut-être la critique discrète d'une piété formaliste et ritualiste s'exprime-t-elle, en effet, dans cette anecdote ? Cependant rien n'indique une opposition de principe au monachisme. Sur le point de mourir, Juliana dit son regret de n'avoir pas été jugée digne de suivre la voie "angélique", c'est-à-dire monastique, comme elle l'eut souhaité.

Il reste que Juliana présente très nettement – et son biographe paraît vouloir le souligner – la plénitude de la vie chrétienne vécue dans le siècle dans les conditions ordinaires d'une femme mariée, mère de nombreux enfants ; dans un milieu où règne la violence tant individuelle que sociale, elle subit le poids des malheurs

et catastrophes qui frappent toute la société. En vivant selon l'Évangile dans le monde, ne lui a-t-il fallu autant, sinon plus d'héroïsme que si elle avait pu suivre son désir de se réfugier dans un monastère ? Telle est la question posée implicitement par Droujina Ossorguine en rapportant une scène pathétique de la vie de sa mère. Folle de désespoir après la mort violente de deux de ses fils, s'ajoutant aux sept autres petits morts, Juliana demande à son mari de la laisser prendre l'habit monastique. Devant son refus, elle insiste : "Si tu ne me laisses pas aller, je m'enfuirai de la maison". Mais le mari la supplie "au nom de Dieu" de ne pas l'abandonner : il se fait vieux et les enfants sont encore jeunes. Pour la convaincre il lui lit des passages des écrits des "Saints Pères" : "L'habit noir², dit-il, ne nous sauve pas si nous ne vivons pas selon la règle monastique. Et l'habit blanc ne nous perd pas si nous faisons ce qui plaît à Dieu". Juliana alors répond simplement : "Que la volonté de Dieu soit faite", et décide de rester auprès des siens.

En Juliana Lazarevskaja, telle que le présente l'hagiographe, s'ébauche ainsi une nouvelle synthèse : celle de l'idéal ascétique et mystique du monachisme oriental représenté en Russie par Serge de Radonège et Nil Sorski avec l'appel à une présence active, compatissante et diaconale au monde. Il n'est pas indifférent que cette synthèse soit représentée par une femme.

D'investigations récentes sur Juliana Lazarevskaja, il résulte qu'elle connaissait et pratiquait l'oraison hésychaste, la "prière de Jésus". Telle était l'eucharistie spirituelle dont se nourrissait celle qui distribuait son pain quotidien aux pauvres³.

— Extrait de : Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Prière et sainteté dans l'Église russe*, 2^e édition, Bellefontaine, (SO 33), 1982.

<http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/saints/meres-spirituelles/juliana-lazarevskaja.htm>

Notes:

¹ Ces détails sont tirés de Eugene, Évêque de Mouron, *Au sujet de la glorification et de la vénération ecclésiastique de sainte Juliana*, Saint-Petersbourg, 1910 : livre cité par T.A. Greenan dans une étude encore inédite.

² L'habit noir du moine s'oppose dans l'Église Orthodoxe au vêtement blanc ou de couleur du clergé séculier ou des laïcs.

³ Nous tenons à remercier M. Greenan, *senior lecturer* de langue et littérature russe à l'université de Liverpool, auteur d'une thèse de doctorat en voie d'achèvement sur Juliana Lazarevskaja, pour les indications précieuses qu'il a bien voulu nous communiquer.

Recent diaconal ordinations in the Archdiocese

On 23 December 2007, St Herman's Sobor in Edmonton was the site of the ordination of Daniel Friesen to the Holy Diaconate.

Having previously completed a masters degree in theology in a protetant seminary before his conversion to Orthodoxy, Deacon Daniel completed the OCA's Diaconal Vocations Programme.

He and Matushka Valerie have three children and three grandchildren. They were received into Orthodoxy at St Herman's in 2000, coming from the Baptist Church in which he had been a pastor for ten years.



Deacon Daniel is shown with his matushka Valerie, Archbishop Seraphim and several of the clergy and servers at his ordination.



Deacon Petr and his matushka Anna are shown with Archbishop Seraphim at the conclusion of the ordination Liturgy.

On 4 November 2007, Archbishop Seraphim ordained Petr Boitchouk to the Holy Diaconate in Holy Trinity Sobor, Winnipeg.

Deacon Petr, born in Ukraine but having lived in Russia for most of his life, came to Canada ten years ago, and he has completed over 70% of his diaconal studies at the St Arseny Institute in Winnipeg.

He is married to Matushka Anna (from Vladivostok), and they have two sons, Nikita and Yaroslav. From time to time Deacon Petr, in addition to his service at the Winnipeg sobor, serves at Sts Peter and Paul Sobor in Montréal when he is there on business.

On 30 September 2007, Archbishop Seraphim ordained Roman Semenov to the Holy Diaconate in Christ the Saviour Sobor, Toronto, to which Deacon Roman is attached.

Born in Russia, near St Petersburg, Deacon Roman is a graduate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Matushka Olga comes from Izhevsk, near the Ural Mountains.



Deacon Roman and his matushka Olga are shown with Archbishop Seraphim, Fr Oleg Kirillov (left, Rector, Christ the Saviour Sobor), and Fr Anatoliy Melnyk (right, Sts Peter and Paul Sobor, Montréal).

A community of compassion and service

Fr Roberto Ubertino, founder and Executive Director of St John the Compassionate Mission in Toronto, has been known to ask his volunteers, at the mission's soup kitchen, bakery, and thrift store, an interesting question: "If you knew there was an exam you had to pass in order to get into heaven, and you were able to get the questions ahead of time so that you would be prepared to have the correct answers, wouldn't you be thrilled? Well, I have them right here for you!" Then he opens a Bible and begins to read Matthew 26:31-46:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger or take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Fr Roberto then goes on to read the rest of the passage, about the "goats" on Christ's left, those people who did not feed the hungry, or give drink to the thirsty, or take in the stranger, or clothe the naked, or visit the sick or imprisoned. How horrified these folk must have been when the King told them that because they had not done any of these things for the least of their fellow men, they had not done them for Him. So the "goats" did not make it into the Kingdom, but the righteous, who had served the poor, the sick, the fallen, the distressed — these were allowed to enter in, with great rejoicing.

For Fr Roberto, as well as for the many people over the years who have caught his vision, "the grace of the Mission [of St John the Compassionate] is to discover the place of our individual poverty and brokenness, and to learn to receive and give compassion from that place." He goes on to quote St Gregory Nazianzus, who wrote "Christ Himself, identified with the hungry, the lonely, the prisoners, the loveless. We approach Him and serve

Him in this life only in the poorest among us." (XIV Discourse 39 on Matthew 26)

The volunteers to whom Fr Roberto was reading the passage from St Matthew are a remarkable lot. Most of them (though not all) are very poor or, in one way or another, quite marginalized in society. To their work at St John's Mission they bring their poverty, their lack of education and/or "life skills," their childhood trauma, their abusive relationships, their addictions, and their mental, emotional and physical brokenness and challenges. They also bring the skills they have, the knowledge and experience they have, and their deep need for community, as well as their love and their joy. With all of these weaknesses and strengths, they serve each other and those who come to the mission for food, for comfort, for compassionate companionship. For, as Fr Roberto intensely believes, none of us is without something that we can offer to community, no matter how weak or limited or damaged we may be.

Since 1987, under the guidance of Fr Roberto, St John the Compassionate Mission has been operating as an Orthodox community serving *anyone* in need. It has a soup kitchen which serves various meals on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays throughout the whole year, as well as extra drop-in meals for breakfast and in the evenings during the coldest months of the year (the "out of the cold" programme), and extra drop-in meals during the summer (the "cooling station" programme). The mission umbrella also includes a gourmet bakery next door (featuring Breton recipes, sour dough, and all-organic ingredients from less than 160 km away!), and a thrift store at a nearby location, both enterprises training people in skills which can help them to find work.

Twenty years ago, when the Mission began, the first people through the door were children, who brought their parents; other adults followed. Now St John's again has a very active outreach to children, both through the tutoring programme for immigrant children and youth, and the Sunday school programme for those who attend St Silouan's Chapel.

The Divine Liturgies, the all-night vigils, the Vespers and Matins services at St Silouan the Athonite Chapel (the "inner sanctum" of the mission, so to speak), gives spiritual support to the hands-on work of serving the poor and the broken. Under the omophorion of Metropolitan Nicholas (Carpatho-Russian Diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate), the parish currently has a Rector (Fr Roberto) and two Assistant Priests (Fr Michael

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of the Carpatho-Russian diocese, and Fr John, a retired priest of the Greek Archdiocese), as well as a Sub-deacon and a Reader, the latter also serving as Choir Director. Parishioners come from many Orthodox backgrounds: Greek, Russian, Romanian, and others. Therefore services are in English. There is a very active catechumenate, with many of the catechumens coming originally from the marginalized in society, and there are also lay catechists to teach them.

I was blessed this past June by Archbishop Seraphim to work at this mission, on a one-year contract, managing the “soup kitchen” programme for meals during the day on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. It was, and still is, like being tossed into the middle of chaos : the chaos of totally donated food (what can we possibly make next?); the chaos of volunteer helpers who may or may not show up (illness? addiction problems? forgetfulness? sheer irresponsibility? goodness knows what!) ; the chaos of volunteers who are unable to follow directions, or who throw an outrageous fit when someone “pushes a wrong button”; and a million other problems and distractions, no two alike, every single day. Working in this chaos is exhausting.

Yet every day I also see compassion (“suffering with”); I see forgiveness, even to seventy times seven; I

For many decades, coming as I do from a “work ethic” sort of family, I found it difficult to understand how people could be on social assistance for the greater part of their lives, as are so many of those we serve and those who volunteer with us. I could not understand how people could not break free of their addictions. Yet now, as I have heard so many of their stories, I realize that no one *wants* to be marginalized. The traumas they have suffered in the past often seem insurmountable to me. They have suffered much, and full recovery may be impossible in this life. But they do, like me, have the deepest desire for love, for forgiveness, for hope, and for community.

Belatedly I have begun to realize that only when we recognize our own inner poverty, our own falling short of the glory of God; only when we identify ourselves in the poor, the addicted, the despised; only when we realize that they cannot hide their brokenness, while we, more fortunate in our circumstances, can hide our own brokenness, our own sins, our own spiritual poverty — only then can we witness in ourselves the growth of deep compassion for all. Remembering our Lord’s separating the “sheep” from the “goats,” we can begin truly to understand the necessity for, and the meaning of, service to the poor, the hungry, the sick (physically, mentally, and



St John’s trapeza (dining room) is often filled to capacity.

see a true community of caring; and I see the joy which so many people clearly experience in serving each other and the poor. I sense that joy in myself too. For we all, rich or poor, healthy or otherwise, are deeply “broken” in one way or another, and in need of loving, supportive community..

emotionally), the imprisoned. In such service we are living out our unity in essence with the poor, as well as our love for and service to Christ. And we can begin to understand St Maximus the Confessor, in his *Mystagogy of the Church*, when he says that “The poor man is God.”

—Mother Sophia, Monastic Community of St Silouan the Athonite

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To find out more about St John the Compassionate Mission, see <http://www.stjohnsmmission.org/> .

