



# Crossroads

The Monthly Newsletter of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

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**JULY, 2008**

**MISSIONS AND THE PARISH IN DECLINE:  
How International Missions Benefit the Local Parish**

**by Fr. David Rucker**

The members of the Parish Council could not believe what they were hearing. Did their pastor not understand their church was dying? How could he possibly think they should host an international missions event in this church? Support missionaries? They could not even pay their pastor a living wage.

It had not always been like this. The vision of the founders of St. Mark's, a small town Protestant parish, had once been so glorious. Fueled by a strong faith in the risen Christ, those early leaders had a vision for a beautiful place of worship and community life not only for themselves but also for others in their bustling town. They were surrounded by other towns with busy factories and industry, providing employment and prosperity for the entire area. The future looked bright indeed. The people at St. Marks were good and faithful stewards, and they bought prime land. With their own hands they erected a beautiful church building. By their prayers, others joined them and they grew and matured as a parish.

But now, after generations of baptisms, weddings, and funerals, times had radically changed and so had the neighborhood, town, and surrounding area. Those inspired pioneers had been buried long ago; it seemed the original vision and purpose of the parish had been buried with them. The church went through eight pastors in eighteen months, and no one could revive the parish. When the bishop finally called my father and asked him to consider taking on St. Mark's parish, he noted, "Either you go and try to raise the dead, or I will go to pronounce last rites." My father took the challenge.

My father had a gift for helping troubled parishes thrive, but he had little success at St. Mark's. The strategies for reviving an older established parish in a depressed area were not working in this Midwestern town. He came to the end of his resources, and perhaps that is why he finally brought the idea of an International Missions Emphasis Week to the Parish Council. A missionary-sending agency had been suggesting this to my father ever since he took the parish. The missions agency had "ambassadors" and

regional representatives who stopped in regularly to visit my parents. They would leave with an enthusiastic exhortation to, "Call us when you are ready to host a missions event in your parish!"

When my father presented the idea to the Parish Council, the members thought he had gone crazy. When they realized he was serious, they began reciting a litany of reasons they could not do it. "We don't even know how we are going to pay you next month, Pastor! How can we support missions and missionaries?" The church treasurer actually threatened to resign. He was quick to remind the Council of the long list of building repairs and the shortfall in the current budget. Others were even more blunt. "Why should we care about the rest of the world when we can't even take care of our own problems?" Late in the night, by a slim margin, the Council gave in to their pastors request. Perhaps a few members thought, "If we are going to have to close this parish, we might as well do it with some hoopla! Let our young pastor give it a try!"

It was the Fall of 1969. I was nine years old, and I can remember that Missions Sunday as if it were last year. That lethargic little parish of barely 60 people in a sleepy bedroom'- community was not prepared for what began that Sunday. Two missionary families arrived "fresh from the fields" of Haiti and Korea. They brought their slides and their displays, but most importantly, they brought themselves. Missions and evangelism were no longer associated with some special appeal offering for exotic work in strange countries. Suddenly, missions was up-close and personal. The missionaries stayed in parishioners' homes. By the end of the week, missions and evangelism had a face. Through those two missionary families the people of St. Mark's realized, perhaps for the first time, that there was a world out there filled with people more like them than not, people who had either never heard the

name of Jesus, or did not know enough about Him to believe in Him and become part of His Church. The members of St. Mark's began to understand that as members of Christ's Body they were called to participate in making the message of the Gospels truly "good news" to people everywhere, that the whole world was their parish. They began to see that by participating in missions they could participate more fully in the glory of God.

Throughout the week the members of St. Mark's parish ate, laughed, and cried with the missionaries and learned that these were real people much like themselves who, in a leap of faith, had left work, home, and family in order to seek after and obey God. Most importantly, they began to realize that they could and should participate in making disciples of all nations, fulfilling the Great Commission (sec : Matthew 28:18-21); Mark 16:1; Acts 1:8).

There were events for every age group in the parish. Missionaries spent time with children in activities designed especially for kids. The youth sponsored a "coffee house" in the church basement for an evening of listening to music and to a missionary speak specifically to them as one who truly cared about their needs and their futures. The men had an early | morning pancake breakfast and learned how they could rise to the greatest challenge ever put before them. Thee women enjoyed a "Tea" with the missionary wives and daughters and began visualizing how they could help the missionaries through prayer and support. And on the following Sunday, an offering of "pledges" was taken up after the regular "tithes" had been received. The missionaries had made it clear they did not want to receive the tithes that belonged to the local parish. They challenged the parishioners to prayerfully ask God what He might give through them that He would not otherwise give to them in the next twelve months. By

faith, people made "pledges" designated exclusively for international missionary outreach. When the total was announced, it came to \$12,000.00 pledged to missions for the coming year. The parish was in shock!

It did not end there. The next year, thanks to an invitation extended by the mission agency, some of the members of St. Mark's spent two weeks visiting "their" missionaries in the countries where they served. When the parishioners returned home, they were asked to share their experiences with the congregation in the second annual International Missions Emphasis Week.

That is when it got personal for me. I was ten, and I can still see the strapping, gruff Hoosier farmer standing at the lectern, grasping it white-knuckled. This was one of the men who initially had been most opposed to having a missions event in the church. He reminded us of that fact. Now he stood before us, lips quivering, tears in his eyes, talking about how God had "broken his heart in Haiti," and how he could never be the same. And he was not! Neither were any of the other people who went. Within three years St. Mark's parish, the church that the bishop had intended to close, had tripled in membership and doubled their budget, all the while becoming increasingly involved in supporting international missions.

But St. Mark's parish was not satisfied yet. My parents began to lead the parish in praying that someone from St. Mark's might be called into full-time missionary service. They prayed that they might have the privilege of sending out one of their own. Little did they know how well those prayers would be answered. Just a few years after that first Missions Week, the youth minister and his wife and two young children were in Brazil as missionaries. The next year another family became missionaries. And finally, the pastor and his family applied and

were accepted into missionary service. I was promoted from PK (pastor or priest's kid) to MK (missionary kid).

When we left the parish in the summer of 1973, the annual offerings and pledges for international missions were over \$25,000.00. St. Mark's parish continued to use the simple concept of giving by faith specifically for missions above and beyond regular "tithes" for the support of the local parish. Amazingly, it really worked in this parish!

Today, the greatest challenge for the future growth and maturity of the Orthodox Church around the world is not the lack of resources. It is not the lack of money. It is not the success of the heterodox, nor the ravaging work of the heretics. It is not even the revival of Islam or any other religion. The greatest challenge is convincing Christians, especially Orthodox Christians, that Jesus' Great Commission to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) still means what it has always meant, and that it is given to every local parish, under the omophorion of its bishop, everywhere. As Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos has written,

*"Christ completed His salvific work. The translation—both the literal and figurative— of His message to all the world was not to be His own work. He entrusted the responsibility to his Apostles (the Church He founded). And the Apostles in turn entrusted the continuation of their work to their successors. This spiritual relay race continues in the hands of the Church as a whole until the Lord comes again. This characteristic of Apostleship indelibly wrought in the very nature of Church and should be lived in every age, under new conditions and against new challenges. Mission is part of the Church's genetic material a fixed element in its DNA. It is a gift of grace organically fused to the*

*Church, nourished as it is by the Eucharistic community; and the Church is, in turn, constantly renewed by the Apostolic calling. Evangelism and mission outreach is part of the "DNA of our Church."*

The local parish is truly "constantly renewed by the Apostolic calling." It happened in a small, dying parish in the Midwest. Their great omission had been in ignoring the Great Commission. In the Great

Commission they discovered one of the major reasons for their existence and their renewal. The seeds of obedience planted by the faithful members of St. Mark's parish in responding to the Great Commission are still bearing fruit to this day.

Where will this happen next? Only God knows, but OCMC is ready to serve a participate wherever that may be.

*[Fr. David Rucker, the third generation son of Protestant ministers and missionaries, served with his wife and children as a Protestant missionary for 13 years prior to becoming Orthodox. Hew was ordained to the priesthood in 2002 and founded an OCA mission parish in Kentucky. He serves as Associate Director of OCMC, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center.]*

#### **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

- **COMMUNITY LUNCHEON – SATURDAY JULY 5 at 9 AM –**
- **ST. HELENA'S GUILD MEETING – SUNDAY JULY 13 after the liturgy**
- **CAREGIVERS – info will be forthcoming**
- **FIRST FRIDAY TEEN GATHERING – further info will be forthcoming**
- **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY JULY 16 at 7 PM.**
- **FALL FESTIVAL MEETING, SUNDAY JULY 20, after the liturgy.**
- **SO WHAT'S IT LIKE? HIGH SCHOOL – COLLEGE STUDENT GET TOGETHER – SUNDAY AUGUST 3: 5 – 7 PM.**
- **INREACH/OUTREACH MEETING – SUNDAY AUGUST 10, AFTER LITURGY.**
- **SUMMER CHURCH SCHOOL – MONDAY-FRIDAY AUGUST 11-15.**

#### **ICONS PREPARED BY YVETTE ABDALLAH:**

Here is my list of completed icons and those in production.

**Annunciation:** 13 x 17 will be varnished on Holy Friday and for sale the first of second week of May Price: \$950, for church family: \$800

**Theotokos and Jesus:** 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 completed. For sale now.  
Price: \$800, for church family \$700

**Holy Trinity:** 11 x 14 in progress should be finished in June or July low air humidity providing. Yet to be priced.

#### **ST. HELENA'S GUILD MEETING:**

- **COFFEE HOUR - Back to the Basics** – We are asking everyone to please keep it simple when you are hosting. We greatly appreciate all that you do- but please stick to the basics. Bagels/bread/cookies/veggies/fruit – it's just to help us refuel our bodies after the fast- it's not meant to be a full meal. We don't want anyone to feel put out and or feel they have to compete. Contact **Marie Clifton (856-482-1059)** if you want to host one of those week or if there has been a change in your coffee hour. **\*\*Special note:** we have a few parishioners that are highly allergic to nuts, please label items if possible or keep all ingredient labels if purchased. Please don't be offended if we ask you to remove certain items from the table.\*\* As always your generous

donations are greatly appreciated as they help defer the cost of the supplies for coffee hour.

- **ACME GROCERY RECEIPTS** – Remember to save your grocery receipts from **ACME only**. Place them in the little bag on the bulletin board. We do all the leg work and get “cash” back from participating ACME stores.
- **ST. HELENA’S GUILD MEETING** – **July 13**, after liturgy – downstairs (during summer church schedule). Please join us. Next Guild Meeting is **August 3**.
- **FESTIVAL PREPARATION**: August 22 & 23 – Stuffed Cabbage and September 5 & 6- Pierogies. Sign Up Sheets located in Social Room. We are asking for anyone in the church who has even an hour to help on any of these dates. If you want to make a donation, contact Kathy Bisaga (856-983-3349) or Diane Vozdovic at (609-288-6833)
- **GUILD CORNER**: We still have a few nut/poppy seed rolls for sale. Also available are T-Shirts—see Diane Vozdovic.
- **Father’s Day Raffle** – Winner (Ray Vozdovic).

## Fall Festival

**Mark the date: September 27 & 28**

We will need donations of the following: Coke, Diet Coke, Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, Sprite, Diet Sprite, Root Beer, Bottles of Water.

**Baked Goods:** Donations of baked goods would also be appreciated. Popular sellers are cookies, brownies, scones, cakes, pies, muffins. Sugar free baked goodies are extremely popular. Ethnic baked goods also a plus.

**Basket Raffle:** Donations of gift baskets are also needed. Gift cards are also welcomed. Please solicit businesses that you know for donated items or coupons. Please see Barbara Shimchick or Diane Pasca for details.

*Volunteers also needed!!!!*

For more information on the Fall Festival, please see Valerie Olesnovich or Liz Gibbons.

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**4<sup>th</sup> Annual OCHC Golf Tournament** – See the flyer enclosed with this month’s Crossroads. If you know of anyone that would be interested in playing, please pass our flyer on to them. We are also looking for sponsors and separate forms are available through Mark Skuby or Dan Dowiak. We will be mailing out forms to our previous sponsors, but are always looking for new ones. Last year we realized a profit of \$1145. There is room for growth with this event, contact Mark (856-802-1664) or Dan (856-234-6318) if you can offer any assistance.



**Fourth Annual  
Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross  
Golf Tournament**

***Best Ball Format (with mulligans)!***

*Date:* Saturday, September 13, 2008 *Tee Time:* 1:00 PM

*Where:* Indian Springs Golf Club *Registration:* 11:30 PM  
115 South Elmwood Road - Marlton, NJ

*Cost:* \$95/golfer (\$380/foursome)

**REGISTRATION INCLUDES:**

- 18 holes of golf with cart
- lunch ticket at snack bar
- bucket of balls on driving range
- banquet dinner during awards ceremony
- entry into all tournament contests (longest drive, straightest drive, closest-to-the pin on all par 3s)

All proceeds from the tournament benefit the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ and our efforts to pay down the mortgage on our new facility.

-----**Please Return Bottom Portion w/ Payment by September 8, 2008**-----

**Name of Golfer #1** \_\_\_\_\_

*Golfers 1 & 2 will ride together.*

**Name of Golfer #2** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Golfer #3** \_\_\_\_\_

*Golfers 3 & 4 will ride together.*

**Name of Golfer #4** \_\_\_\_\_



**Point of Contact for Golf Group: Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone / Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to *Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross*  
Please send registration information and check to:  
Mark Skuby – 234 Belaire Drive – Mount Laurel, NJ 08054  
856-802-1664 (home) / 610-348-2132 (cell) / skubydoo81@verizon.net

# RESPONSIBILITIES for July, 2008

## COFFEE HOUR

July 6: Kathy Bisaga & Diane Zanghi  
13: Barbara Mosser & Nellie Kuzmenchuk  
20: Hamaty Family  
27: Emilia DiCarlo  
August 3: Liz Gibbons

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## READERS

July 6: Gary Mosser  
13: Diana Pasca  
20: Gene Dubiago  
27: Greg Sapnar  
AUGUST 3: Julia Mosser

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## ALTAR SERVERS

July 6: Anatoly Lane & Nicholas Zanghi  
13: Matthew Brook & Paul Giovanni  
20: Eli Nugent & David Hamaty  
27: Andrew & Paul Abdallah  
August 3: Stephen Shimchick & Brenda Detwiler

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## COMMUNION USHERS

29: Yvette Abdallah & Christina Zanghi  
July 6: Faye Nugent & Elisabeth Graham  
13: Alexandra & Magdalena Plachuta  
20: Sierra & Miranda McCleery  
27: Yvette Abdallah & Christina Zanghi  
August 3: Faye Nugent & Elisabeth Graham