

from CROSSROADS JUNE, 2013

ON GETTING THERE

Over the weekend of November 9-10 we will be joined by Bishop Michael in celebrating our parish's 40th Anniversary. Forty, appearing 146 times throughout the entire Bible, is used to signify completion or fulfillment. As explained by one commentator, "It is the traditional Hebrew number for the duration of a trial of any kind, when times are hard and a person's faith is tested. The Israelites slaved in hard bondage under the Egyptian pharaohs for 400 years, 10 times 40. God forced them to wander in the Wilderness of Sin, throughout the Sinai Peninsula, for 40 years as punishment for their "stiff-necked unbelief." Moses was 40 days on Mount Sinai receiving God's Law, another 40 days on the mountain after the golden calf sin. Elijah, some 300 years later, spent 40 days on the same mountain worshipping God. The most notable are the 40 days and nights of rainfall that caused the Flood of Noah. Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness before being tempted by Satan. Jesus remained on Earth for 40 days after his Resurrection, appearing to the Apostles and teaching them, before ascending to Heaven. At the time of his Ascension, there were about 120 Christians on Earth, or 40 times 3." Great Lent lasts for 40 days.

The sense of completion or fulfillment represented by 40 does not mean, of course, the end of the story, but rather that the conclusion of one phase—guided by experience, reflection, and some accumulated self-knowledge—can and should mark the beginning of another. So, over the next few months as we approach the Anniversary I would like to consider some of our experiences and hopefully, lessons learned over these years, welcoming your suggestions and input.

Below is the last piece written for Crossroads in November, 2000, as we prepared to leave the old church and move to what we considered would be the temporary space of St. Mary of the Lakes School Chapel on Route 70. As you can tell from the tone of what I and Wally Loza, our Warden at the time, wrote — we anticipated a quick building project. In reality, it was our home for almost four years!

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Each week we have been getting closer. Thanks to the organizational efforts of Diana Pasca and Lillian Lane and all those who have worked with them, many items have been packed and already moved into storage. The pews, tables, chairs, and any other large items will be removed on November 9-10, following our last Sunday on November 5. Almost daily we discuss how we will structure and use our new liturgical space at St. Mary's School chapel. We really do anticipate starting our site development about the same time that we will be making our move.

We are just about ready and are set in our plans. But before we go, let's think for a

bit about what our present church has meant to us as individuals and as a community.

When I first arrived here as pastor in March, 1986 I learned of the parish's history and how it was that by a close decision we had decided to acquire the church building in 1984. For some the decision represented the end to many years of temporary rental space: having to set up the chairs and an altar area with an iconostas each week in a hall. Despite its limitations —the outside did not look like an Orthodox church, the hall was too small, etc. — it was still our church. For others it was always a "starter" church. "This is only a temporary facility," I was told. "We have plans to build a new church someday." To some extent these positions of temporary and permanent have stayed with us and have represented a certain limitation and obstacle. Because it was not perceived by many to be our permanent church there has often been a tendency not to care and maintain it and its grounds with the greatest concern. For others, because it represented a permanent location there would be a suspicion and reluctance to imagine that anything else was possible.

No matter how one has perceived our church over the years, let us not leave without acknowledging and even celebrating with fondness all that it has made possible for us. God has given us the opportunity of celebrating almost 15 complete liturgical cycles in our church —fifteen times through all of the Great Feasts and the Paschal season.

Fifteen years of pirohi sessions and Annual Meetings!

For some, our church is where they first experienced the Orthodox faith and a community that worshipped in English. It was where they felt "welcome" and, in a way, as many have said, "like they had been in no other place." For some, my family included, it was where we brought our newborn children for Baptism and Chrismation. Our records indicate that 94 adults and children were received as Orthodox Christians in our church. For 18 couples, it was the place where they publicly affirmed their love for each other and were married.

During the ten years of our rental life at Our Lady of Perpetual Help church hall in Maple Shade our community never experienced the death of any regular parishioners. Over the years since then many of our loved ones and friends have fallen asleep in the Lord and were buried from our church. These included: Dennis Siry (one of the leaders of our community), Olga Lawson, Paul Novitzky, Paul Senin, Joseph Sopko, Helen Senin, Barbara Sura Rebecca Karpiak, Paul Stosuy, Ceil Sopko, Eugene Reduto, Sophie Stosuy, Sue Yaksich, Alice Gambal, Russell Alexicko, Henry Fissmer, Bessie Anthon, John Kuzma Sr., Tony Yushchak, and Serge Gambal.

We have tried, despite the logistical obstacles of limited time and geographic distances, to maintain a regular education program. We have sought not just to provide information about God and the Church but to help our children and our

ourselves come to "know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent" (John 17:3). Our building has provided us with space for adult and youth education and a whole week of summer church school. Its grounds were wonderful for running and playing, for water games, kickball, volleyball, gardening, and our outdoor parish picnic.

We have had the space to invite others for special lectures and retreats, welcoming some of the most important Orthodox theologians and speakers, including: Frs. Thomas Hopko and Paul Lazor, Mrs. Sophie Koulomzin (newly departed), Matushka Juliana Schmemann, and Frederica Mathewes-Green. Jim Forest, an internationally recognized Orthodox author and lecturer living in Holland, delivered his first sermon in an Orthodox church in our parish. Our festival provided an invitation for many to experience a variety of ethnic foods and music (thinking especially of the joyful music of Peter Mikuliak), and also to see for themselves what an Orthodox community is like.

Our church was the place where we sometimes struggled in learning to live and interact with each other. It was the place where we disagreed and occasionally even argued. But it was also the place where we attempted to hear, accept, and make real in our lives the words from the Paschal Stichera, which are sung at the beginning of Great Lent during the rite of Forgiveness and on Pascha night: "let us call 'brothers' (and sisters, of course) even those who hate us, and forgive all by the Resurrection."

Finally, let's not forget that our church even proved to be a bountiful economic blessing — nearly doubling its original price!

With all of its resources and limitations, let's be thankful for everything our church has provided for us. Realizing, that many of these things we, obviously, will never have the chance to experience again in the same way.

So, being almost ready and set to move, having spent a few minutes in counting our blessings, let's go!

The last one out—please turn off the lights.

This Groundbreaking Won't Be Ceremonial

It seems as if years have passed since Archbishop Peter was with us for the ceremonial groundbreaking for our new church building. In fact, it was more than two years ago.

Until now, the only thing that has grown on the site since that date is vegetation. But that's about to change. At deadline time, we anticipate that the paperwork involved with the site work performance bond will be signed and submitted to Medford Township by Monday, October 30.

At that point, our engineers will stake the site, and the site development contractor will begin the excavation. Hopefully, we'll see signs that work has actually commenced when we gather for the final Divine Liturgy in our present building on Sunday, November 5.

The following weekend, we'll begin holding services in our temporary facilities at St. Mary of the Lakes School. Hopefully, we'll be at home in our new building by the end of next summer.

We're grateful to the St. Mary parish community for making the wonderful facilities available to us. Although we'll have a temporary haven, it still won't be our home. This will present some real challenges to us as a community. In many ways, our life as a community is linked to the physical structure we call home. For many of us, this will be the first time that we've been part of a church community that isn't anchored in its own facility.

Many of our parishioners experienced life together as a worshipping and working community for years before our present building was acquired. I pray that they will inspire us to move through this transitional period without losing our sense of vision as a community of God's people. The Church is not a building. Hopefully, the next few months will bring us all to a deeper realization of this reality.

— Wally Loza

[We incorporated into our weekly liturgies this Prayer for the Building of a New Church, adapted from that used by Holy Cross Mission, Baltimore, Maryland as presented in Facing East by Frederica Mathewes-Green]

O Lord our God, hear our prayer: we your servants come before you asking your guidance and blessing as we proceed in establishing a new home for our parish. We pray that all we do in this process be according to your will. Indeed we pray that you would block and close any doors where your will is not found. And open wide those that lead to the upbuilding of your Kingdom. Be our only leader and guide, blessing that which is right, preventing that which is wrong. Finally, we thank you for our being called together as a community, for the ministries in this body, and most especially for our redemption through the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ: through the intercession of the Holy Theotokos and of all the saints. For You are a merciful God, and love mankind, and to You we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.