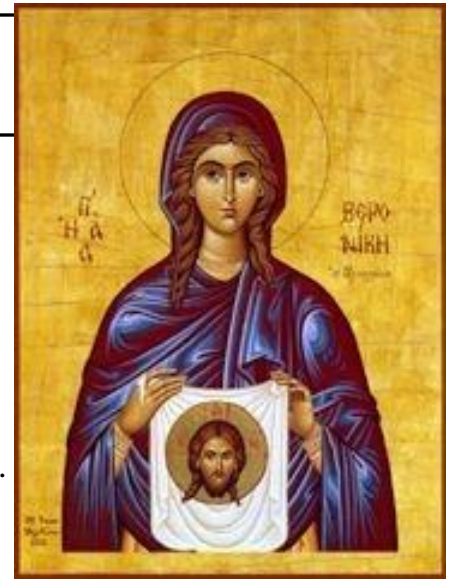




Pastor's Corner

The Very Rev. Fr. Matthew MacKay

One of the things I love most about the Orthodox church is that we are a church and community of new beginnings. It brings me great joy to experience and participate in many of these new beginnings in our parish with you all. There are many traditions, rites, and rituals that we do that celebrate these new beginnings. We have the birth of children (1st day and 8th day prayers) and the 40th day churching of mom and baby. Then there is the baptism and chrismation. There is communion for all the faithful. We have unction, at least once a year. Confession is always available. Our homes are blessed with Holy water. And when someone passes to life eternal we have a meaningful and beautiful funeral service. Then to claim that our loved ones are not forgotten, we have Memorial Trisagions. All of these and many more are times and opportunities for a new beginning.



Venerable Veronica, comm. July 12

These new beginnings are a time for us to begin afresh or to start over. It means we have the possibility to become reconnected. Whatever we have done or left undone we can correct or make anew. We can reconnect with family, friends, and neighbors. All of our relationships have the possibility of improving or even growing at these times. We are not doomed to repeat our past nor become stagnant in our mistakes. There is always hope for a change: from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy, and from death to life.

My joy is in seeing everyone present participating and growing in these experiences. I have seen young people fall in love and become a married couple. I have then seen that same young couple become parents. I have seen children grow into young adults. I have seen middle-aged folks grow wise. Most importantly, I have seen people's faith and relationship with God, the Saints, the Angels, and other people grow and develop. I call these the many little graces that God provides for us on our journey to heaven. These are times for us to reflect and to take stock in our life. They are a time to take a reading on our spiritual bearings. It is up to us to take advantage of these times and to connect or reconnect with God and others around us. When we do this we will remain on course or change course to remain faithful. So let us all look for these little graces God sends us and use them as a new beginning in our life.



From the Chair



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As I was trying to decide what to write this month for the Epistle newsletter, I realized that **summertime** is upon us. With temperatures soaring and the sounds of children playing, all you need to do is step out of your house and you will know summer has arrived.

In the United Kingdom, *vacation* once specifically referred to the long summer break taken by the [law courts](#) and universities. Many upper-class families moved to a summer home for part of the year, leaving their usual family home vacant, contraction *vacate*. *Vacation*, in English-speaking North America, describes recreational travel, such as a short pleasure trip, or a journey abroad. Most of the rest of the English-speaking world says *going on holiday*, rather than use of the word *vacation*. *Holiday* is a [contraction](#) of [holy](#) and [day](#). The word *holiday* originally referred to only [special religious days](#). In modern use, it means any special day off from work or school.

When most of us decide to take a *vacation*, it's usually is because we have been working so hard for the past few months and realize it's time to get away (to *vacate*). We want to get some much needed rest, to forget about what we are supposed to do and just do absolutely nothing!! But, we must never *vacate* our lives from God. When we are on *vacation*, we should be faithful in our daily prayers, always be ready to help others in need, and always worship God in our sister churches at the Divine Liturgy on Sundays.

St. Joseph has been blessed on many Sundays with visitors who join us when they are "*on holiday*." Our parishioners graciously welcome them as family during our fellowship time. When we are not in our own parish, remember that we have brothers and sisters in Christ in many, many places. Our home is the Church no matter where we are.

Next time you are on *vacation*, God will go with you if you invite Him. Don't *vacate* and leave Him out of your life temporarily. Have a safe and blessed summer wherever your travels may take you this summer, and be sure to make each day a *holiday* – a *holy day*.

Faithfully yours in Christ,
Helen (Eleni) Norton, Chairman
Saint Joseph Parish Council



Star of Hope

Fr. James Early

The Star of Hope, to quote from their mission statement, is "a Christ-centered community dedicated to meeting the needs of homeless men, women and their children. Positive life changes are encouraged through structured programs which focus on spiritual growth, education, employment, life management and recovery from substance abuse." It is a huge operation, consisting of four different facilities. The mission is heavily dependent on volunteers, who donate food, money, clothing and other items, in addition to providing help with preparing and serving meals to the residents. Groups from St. Joseph's have volunteered there now a total of five times, and *continued...*



Star of Hope, continued

from August to November, I will be taking a group on the second Saturday of each month to help serve lunch.

On one of our earlier visits, we arrived at the Women and Family Shelter at about 11:30. After signing in, we were escorted to the kitchen, where we were each given a hairnet, a plastic apron, and surgical gloves. Then we went to the serving line, where we each took up a position. The first of us in line would pull out a tray and put a styrofoam bowl on it. The next would fill the bowl with soup – and so on.

The residents started lining up at high noon. In they came: black, white, and Hispanic; some old, some young; some single women, some women with children, and even a few single men with children. Their faces were lined with years of dealing with extra stress that I can only imagine. But what I found amazing was the one thing they all had in common: an ear-to-ear grin. All of them said "thank you," and the gratitude that they were feeling was evident by more than their words.

And then it hit me: these dear people had little more than the shirt on their backs, and yet they radiated contentment. They were thankful just to have a roof over their heads and a hot, nutritious meal. I couldn't help but contrast this with my own attitude. Too often, I find myself bothered because my kids wake me up too early, because my wife is too busy, because I'm not contributing enough to my 401K, because I'm tired of my wardrobe, or because I'm about to have to go without cheese and chocolate for seven weeks. The gratitude of these beautiful creations of God, the residents of the shelter, taught me a valuable lesson--a lesson that St. Paul succinctly summarized to his disciple Timothy: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim. 6:8).

As resident after resident gratefully accepted her tray, I looked intently at each and wondered, "Now, how did she get in this position? Was she abused as a child? Was she abused by her husband (or both)? Did she fall victim to substance abuse? Did she make a series of really bad decisions? Or is she just an average middle-class person who lost her job and couldn't keep up her house payment or pay her rent?" Of course, I didn't find out the story behind a single one of them; our job was not to study them, much less to interrogate them. Our job was simply to show the love of Christ to them by serving them, just as "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

And as I continued to place cups on each tray, I realized that, as the old saying goes, "There but for the grace of God go I." Why was I born to two parents who were committed to me and to each other, who loved me and supported me in all I did, while these dear children of God presumably were not? Why have I always had a roof over my head and a steady income? Why have I been spared from the ravages of substance abuse? Is it because I am somehow smarter, wiser, more moral, or superior in some other way to the residents? I seriously doubt it. Did God, as the Calvinists would say, foreordain that I would have a comfortable life, while he chose these to suffer? As St. Paul would say, "God forbid!" So why then, have my life and the lives of those whom I was providing with cups been so different? Why was I serving them, and not vice-versa? Why weren't THEY living in the suburbs and I in the shelter?

I'm not sure if I'll ever have an answer. I'm not sure there even IS an answer. All I know is that (at least for now) I have been spared the tragedy of homelessness. God has blessed me super-abundantly, and because of this, I must share with those whom our Lord called "the least of these." For as he said, "inasmuch as you did it to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40).

I drove to the shelter hoping to be a blessing to others. I pray that I was. But most importantly, I went away blessed myself. For I was granted the highest privilege of all: in each person, I beheld the face of Jesus. **I hope you will consider joining us in our upcoming volunteer dates!**



Miracles Around Us

Emily K.

Today during Liturgy as I looked around the church, my eyes were suddenly opened to the miracles surrounding us. A woman who died was brought back to life. A man who was lame can now walk. One who was unemployed has found work. Another who was suffering from cancer has been healed. A family that was split by different religions has been united in Orthodoxy. Those who were outside the Church have been brought in, and are serving in the altar. Miracles are all around, but come about so gradually that we fail to notice.

This also made me wonder how many more potential miracles we will find in our midst, if we are open to them. The person standing next to us at Vespers may have an amazing story to tell. The new family looking for a church home may have been brought to us for a reason. Let us take time to talk to each other, even (and especially) to those we don't know well. Consider yourself part of the welcoming committee for St. Joseph's! Let's set ourselves a goal that no one ever leaves our service without receiving a warm smile and a kind word, no visitor without an introduction and an invitation to coffee. Then we will surely abound in miracles.

We will miss Emily's friendliness when she and her family move to Singapore this August!

Please remember to bring donations of nonperishable food to St. Joseph this season to be shared with a local food bank.

Bake Sale

Mark your calendars! On September 20, the women of St. Joseph will be holding a bake sale to raise funds for the hall renovations. Please contact Marci Birthisel if you would like to contribute some goodies. Be sure to bring your sweet tooth!



St. Joseph's Men

David Driver

Full time jobs, family, homework, etc., etc.! How can the men of St. Joseph come together with our busy lives? While all of our daily activities and obligations are necessary and do present opportunities to witness to The Truth, they can make it difficult for us to function as a "group." Perhaps we should simply be called "The Siblings of St. Joseph"!

All joking aside, however, a large number of men serve behind the scenes at Liturgy, with church finances, teaching, outreach, and council duties. Unnoticed, others maintain and restore the interior of the Temple and Parish Hall, or care for our trees, plants, and yard. What a great group effort is being made!

If you missed our July 11 planning meeting, we have scheduled more meetings for the rest of the year on 8/22, 9/12, and 10/24. Please watch the bulletin for details! All of the male persuasion, please come. Giving Glory to our Living God is a marvelous thing!

Visit <http://www.yamhouston.org/> for more information on Houston's pan-Orthodox Young Adult Ministries and activities.

Prayer Request

If you have a prayer request for someone please contact Fr. Matthew or Irene Fedikovich and give either one of them the name(s) of those to be added to the list. Also, specify the type of prayer requested. Alternatively, you may fill out a Prayer Request Form located in the narthex.

IOCC Visit <http://facebook.com> and enter "International Orthodox Christian Charities" to learn more and get all the latest IOCC news!

Remember to check the calendar in the church hall for your scheduled coffee date. Thanks!



Treasurer's Report

Rodger Conner

Over the last few months many of you may have noticed the Treasurer's Office has undergone a few changes -- some physical and some operational.

The Treasurer's Office received a much needed general cleaning and reorganization. New compact file cabinets, donated to the church, replaced the larger more cumbersome file system. Older data files were removed and archived for easy retrieval if necessary. What jokingly had been referred to as a treasurer's closet has been transformed into a space that now seems downright huge -- not quite but generally better and more conducive to efficiency and productivity.

At last year's parish meeting we announced that we had renegotiated the church mortgage from 7.5% to a 6.25% rate. This allows us to pay \$1,700 per month more against the principal. As of May 2009 our mortgage is below \$1 million which provides us with many more options with financial institutions meaning possibly lower rates in the future. The Treasurer's Office has also converted our major savings account with the approval of the Church Council to a money market interest bearing account at 2.25%. This change is netting an average revenue of \$280 per month.

At this time we want to acknowledge the many years that we were with Preferred Bank who handled our operating fund with no service fees. We are most grateful to them for providing us this advantage; however, due to security measures we wanted to put in place at St. Joseph's via remote deposit, it was necessary for us to move our operating fund. The Bank of Houston has graciously provided us with the remote scanning equipment and the service at no charge. What this means is no one has to make a trip to the bank to deposit our money. The entire process is handled conveniently on location. Remote deposit is efficient, expedient and above all provides security. No parishioner or council member is put at risk by having to handle funds and ensure these funds make it to the bank. In this day and time, security is of the utmost importance and we do not wish for anyone to be placed needlessly in harm's way.

As a member of the Finance Committee, I had the privilege to work closely with Rob Sanderson our Treasurer. Rob recognized that our church's financial affairs would be better served by employing QuickBooks software for greater control and recordkeeping. He worked tirelessly and was very devoted to his responsibilities and this project. Due to unexpected illness in his family, Rob had to step aside and focus on the needs of his loved ones. All our thoughts and prayers are with him during this difficult time. On behalf of the Church Council and the parishioners, I wish to thank Rob for his time and dedication to St. Joseph's.

I wish to also acknowledge Nouhad Bassila, Lewis Luckenbach, and Ken Naff for their assistance every Sunday in the Treasurer's Office. There's an old saying, "many hands make light work" and the church's financial affairs run much more smoothly with the help of these devoted individuals. I would also like to thank Rick Krill for his attention to database management and keeping our systems in pristine condition. Rick developed the database that drives pretty much everything in the Treasurer's Office from parishioner contributions to who wants envelopes. Although St. Joseph's has used this system for many years, it is modern in design and should carry us for many years to come. Also I would like to thank my loving wife Pat. She is my right hand and without her weekly assistance I would never make it home since I am a slow typist.

As a reminder, we recently sent in the envelope offering listing for parishioners who wish to use envelopes and this will be for the August and September timeframe. If you require a change to your information, or if you would like to be included or excluded from the envelope listing, please come by the office and let us know so we can make the change for the next submission. We are also in the process of preparing the mid-year statements and they will be available this month. We do expect there to be some corrections, so if your statement does not match your records, please come by the office so we can handle that as well.

As your treasurer I am constantly striving to improve operations, processes, keep our funds secure and to get the largest return on the deposits of the church as possible. The Church Council and Finance Committee have worked on budgets which are keeping within the guidelines approved by the parish. God has blessed us in many ways, and due to the generosity of our parishioners, our church at present is in very excellent financial condition. I am most honored and feel privileged to work as your treasurer and with God's help and your prayers will continue to do the best I can for St. Joseph's Church.

God Bless,

Barsanuphius aka Rodger Conner



St. Joseph Acolytes

Paul Cowan

I would like to welcome and thank the newest members of our parish's acolyte team and where applicable their parents for introducing them to the next level of church service. In the Orthodox Church, an acolyte or an altar boy is a term used for someone who, though unordained, performs liturgical duties such as lighting altar candles, preparing charcoal for incense, and assisting the major orders (bishop, priests and deacon) with the liturgy.

In ancient times the term taper-bearer was used and still is used during the ordination of a Reader. While in other Christian entities the term Acolyte is used for someone preparing for the major orders of clergy, this is not implied in Orthodox usage; but we can hope.

When your son serves for the first time, you should expect him to be nervous, apprehensive and excited. They are now standing in the Holy Altar of God in the presence of God Himself, the Theotokos, the angels and the assembly of saints. From up there, the Theotokos of the Sign icon is enormous. It is a place of respect and awe in the fear of God.

You should expect your sons to make mistakes. Rest assured, the nature of the mistake may vary from child to child, but one thing is certain: they will make mistakes. The error might be something as simple as going the wrong way or standing in the wrong spot for the younger ones. If you feel somewhat embarrassed as a parent, remember that somewhere, sometime in the past 2000 years, the same thing has occurred to someone else's son. This is OK, we learn by doing.

The Orthodox Church is a school for saints and sinners, and sometimes the acolytes are saints and sinners. What can parents do to help? Parents should be prepared to serve. How can parents serve? Parents can serve by preparing their son to serve. Most of the things that help a boy prepare to serve are things that all Orthodox Christians are encouraged to do. A living, breathing example is always best. That is one reason why God gave us parents. Remember, the altar server - along with all of us - is called to the very same level of Christian life as the bishop. The following represents a goal that we strive for in preparing for service:

- 1) Prepare to receive Communion. Aid younger children by helping them abstain.
- 2) Say the prayers in preparation for Communion with your children (at least one, and ideally all the ones in your prayer book).
- 3) Read the Scriptures for the day. Often the boys are occupied during the readings and may be somewhat distracted if they are younger. Reading the Scripture passages beforehand helps them retain their focus.
- 4) Go to Vespers if possible. In a very practical way, Vespers prepares children (both boys and girls) for the Liturgy. I have long noted the positive difference in the children's behavior when they attend Liturgy if they have attended Vespers the night before. If you don't believe me, try it yourself!
- 5) All acolytes are requested to arrive anytime before 9:55am (at least 5 minutes before Liturgy) so as not to be rushed to get their robe blessed by the priest and then dressed and if possible to attend Matins which starts at 8:45am or attend parts thereof.

Can a boy serve if these things aren't done? Yes, he can. I have found the above to be very helpful and developmental, and I highly recommend them.

All the things the priest or bishop does to prepare are nothing more than what we are all called to do; prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc. The standard for the altar server is no different. The difference for the boys is that now they are engaged in a task that is an obligation, a privilege and a responsibility clearly delineated in the eyes of young men for the service of God.

This is the boys' first exposure to a "ministry" presented in a hands-on fashion. This is an opportunity for the young men to learn by doing.

There is one last thing every parent will probably experience when their son begins serving: surprise! Surprise that they can stand so long without squirming! Surprise that they can behave so well! Surprise they know the service better than you might have imagined.

We still have openings for acolytes. If you men (sorry ladies) or your son is interested in assisting weekly or semi-monthly, please see Paul Cowan after service most any Sunday. You can also e-mail him at eaglewithpalms@yahoo.com during the week. All considerations will be taken up with Fr. Matthew. You will not be required to serve every Sunday. If enough interest is shown, we will have a rotating schedule depending on the number of acolytes interested. Remember...the altar server of today may be the bishop of tomorrow!