

# ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary Parish • Santa Rosa, CA. 95407

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## What Can Separate us From the Love of Christ?

*by His Grace, Bishop Michael of New York*

I GREW UP IN BINGHAMTON, New York, in a parish where the church was the center of my life. I served as an altar boy and went to the Church School, which was huge! We had a teenage Bible Study group; the church had a basketball team (which I was not very good at). I ran the parish library. We had altar boy practice every Saturday – we sang the Liturgy and learned about serving the services – there were as many as 36 altar boys at a time! So, almost every weekend, I was in church for Saturday Liturgy, Vespers, Matins, and Sunday Liturgy... plus holy days, baptisms, weddings, funerals and everything else that came with life in the Church.

After high school, I went to college nearby and lived at home. I never had the problem of wondering, “What do I do when I’m on my own?” I worked out my class schedule so I could be at the Liturgy during the week when there was one. Church was the place to be. I loved being in church, and I loved what I was doing in church—especially serving in the Altar and learning about the Faith. So it was only logical for me to want to become an imitation of my parish priest, Fr. Stephen Dutko of blessed memory, so that I could have, and give, that same kind of experience. I wanted to be like Father Stephen.

And so I did. I went to seminary right after college. I got married and ordained at 22 years old. I was assigned to my first parish, Saints Peter and Paul Church in Homer City, PA, and I was raring to go.

Then it all changed. After 29 days of marriage, my wife and I were in a car accident. She was killed instantly. I was in the hospital – in a coma. I came out months later, confused and bitter, guilt ridden and doubting. I was feeling all those kinds of things that a person would feel in that horrific situation. Why did God let this happen? It had to be somebody’s fault. All the confusion, all the anger, definitely made me think about not being a priest anymore.

However, I couldn’t conceive of not serving at the Altar. I could not conceive of living my life outside of that experience that I had had all those years. I just could not imagine that.

So, rather than walk away from the Church, I did what I really needed to do—and what I have counseled so many people, of all ages from the youngest to the oldest, to do when we have these terrible, tragic experiences. And that is to draw closer to Christ in the face of pain and agony and loss. When I did that, it was not just an inner, “me and Jesus” kind of experience. The Lord came to me, and began to heal me through the faces, the words, the embraces, the love of His people: the Church.

My spiritual father was one of them. He was tough on me. He told me, “Your faith just has to kick in.” One of the questions I raised was, “Where was God when all this happened?” And he said, “He was in the same place the day that Debbie died that He was on Great and Holy Friday, when His Son died.” He told me that even though that particular Tuesday when we had the accident might have been a Good Friday to me... still, Good Friday is not the end of the story... Pascha is. He reminded me that Christ triumphed over death—and I had to believe that my wife was a sharer in that victory and in the Resurrection.

### Good Friday is not the end of the Story

So, I never left the Church. I never walked away from the priesthood. My first parish as a priest became a replica of what I had experienced in my home parish as a young person... and those people who I served as a young widowed priest helped me nurse back to spiritual health – as well as me helping them in their dark moments and in their difficulties. It wasn’t just me, as their priest, taking care of them. Guided by God, as His family, we cared for each other.

A famous Christian writer named Tertullian, who lived less than 200 years after Jesus, wrote that “A Christian alone is no Christian.” He meant that no one is saved alone... it takes the Church to save a soul. Whenever I look back on that incredibly painful time in my life, I am more and more deeply convinced that I never would have survived – not spiritually, and maybe not literally – without the Church. I do not mean just the Church as a build-

## INFORMATION

Protection of the Holy Virgin & St. Seraphim of Sarov Church  
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Parish office phone: 584-9491 / fax: 585-9445  
website: [www.saintseraphim.com](http://www.saintseraphim.com)

Our Parish Secretary may be reached at the Church office  
Tuesday–Saturday, 9 AM to Noon, at 584-9491.  
Fr. Lawrence Margitich may be reached at the Parish office  
phone, or at [Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net). He is available Tues-  
day–Saturday, from noon onwards each day.

## PARISH CONTACTS

Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus .....	473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Assistant Pastor .....	318-1559
Fr. John Ramos, Attached .....	570-9849
Deacon Jeremiah Crawford .....	823-5878
Deacon Nicholas Carr .....	588-8753
Sub-Deacon Marc Richardson .....	545-4047
Nicolas Custer, Choir Director .....	584-9491
Nilus Veenis, Sacristan .....	526-2284
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden.....	291-7452
Petar Griovski, Treasurer .....	762-4742
Bonnie Alexander, Recording Secretary.....	778-8528
Lisa Moroz, Sisterhood President.....	360-5119
Parmenas Davis, Church School Coordinator.....	823-2921
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of her daughters, with the priest simply pronouncing the absolution, with the spiritual mother's blessing, as is often done in monasteries of women.)

I have been a monk for over thirty years, and I must say that I can not think of a sin I have not heard before. Not one person has shared anything that was shocking to me, for the human condition is shared by all. What I have experienced, however, is the joy at hearing a good confession. Seeing the burden of guilt and shame lifted, and the tears of true repentance, is a joyful thing. The fear of shame before the priest has kept many from receiving the lifting of the burden of sin, and the banishment of guilt, and all for nothing. The fear of being embarrassed keeps many from making a good confession.

No priest thinks less of a penitent, for all priests rejoice when beholding the lifting of the burden of sin and shame in the Mystery of Confession. Like the penitent, the priest witnesses the mercy of Christ, and the priest, as a sinner himself, is lifted up, for he, too, is in need of Christ's mercy and forgiveness. Our lives become full of passions and sinful habits because we fail to do battle against the very sins that are in need of being confessed. Our wounds and sores are inflamed, because we refuse to apply any remedy to them. The woman at the well beheld the mercy of Christ, and we, too, stand at the well before the Lord, when we stand before the Gospel book, and the Cross, with the priest as the witness before Christ, Who is quick to forgive. *With love in Christ, Abbot Tryphon, Monastery of the Merciful Savior, Vashon Island, WA.*

ing, although that is the place where we meet and pray and even play together. I mean, the Church as a community; the constant presence of the people of God – my spiritual father, my parishioners, my brother priests and their families, with all of the guidance, the prayers and the love that they have to share.

Even though my hope for you who read this is that you never have to go through what I went through, I pray that somehow, whenever you do experience difficulties, doubts, and obstacles, by God's grace, your faith will "kick in." I pray that you will seek, and find, the healing and the love that Our Lord offers us in the faces, the embraces, and the prayers of others — the love of Christ Jesus, shown within the community of His Church.

One of my favorite quotes in the Bible is from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in which he asks the question, "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). And he answers that neither height nor depth... nor life nor death... nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks to the Church, I am living proof that this is true.

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## CONCEALMENT

When we Conceal Our Sins from Our Confessor  
—Abbot Tryphon (Vashon Island)

...A NUMBER OF PEOPLE privately shared that they were hesitant to confess certain sins for fear of being embarrassed before their priest. One woman said she couldn't handle the idea that a man would hear the details of her sinful actions, and wondered what the priest would think of her after having heard her confession. (It should be noted that a spiritual mother can also hear the confessions

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THE ROHNERT PARK STUDY GROUP continues to meet each Tuesday at 7 PM, 1354 Oak View Circle #327, Rohnert Park. Please contact Deacon Jeremiah or Deacon Nicholas for content. For directions please call Debi Shrimplin at 536-9112. Topics for the upcoming sessions will be focused on basic teachings of the Orthodox Church.
- OUR PARISH IS HONORED to host, once again, the **Liturgical Singing Seminar**, February 8 and 9. We expect 60–70 participants, who will come to rehearse, hear lectures, and sing Services for two days. A highlight of the event will be Saturday Vespers, sung by two choirs, antiphonally.
- LSS SUPPPORT: Bobbi Griovski will be organizing the food service for the Liturgical Singing Seminar. We especially need volunteers to help clean on Saturday evening, after the dinner. Call Bobbi at 707-762-4742 if you can help.
- HOUSE BLESSINGS: Due to my recent illness, I was unable to bless any homes during the last two weeks. If your house blessing was postponed, I will call you about setting a new day and time. If you have yet to schedule a house blessing, please call me at 707-584-9491. I am looking forward to blessing every home possible. -Fr. L
- BELL RINGERS: Apologies for postponing. The new date for meeting together for current and prospective ringers is Sunday, Feb. 10, at approximately 12:45 PM.
- SENIORS: Don't miss the Senior Lunch Fellowship on Thursday, February 14, at noon.
- BIBLE READERS: If you are now engaged in the "Bible in a Year" program, you might have questions, confusions and issues about what you have read. If so, then you are invited to jot down your question(s) and receive an answer. In the Narthex there are cards for writing down your questions. Simply place your unsigned (or signed, as you wish) paper in the *Question Box*. Your questions will be answered in due time, maybe at a gathering after the Sunday Agape Meal, TBA; or in the Bulletin/ Sunday Announcement sheet or during sermon. You can also email Father Lawrence with your questions.
- THE PARISH PHOTO DIRECTORY is now ready to be distributed. It's a 28-page black & white photocopy, not a glossy color booklet, and is a "work-in-progress" since addresses, phones and emails are liable to change for anyone of us. If you see a typo, if your photo, or other info does not appear or is incorrect, please send an email to Kathie Franotovich, at <<katfrano@yahoo.com>> and she will make corrections, and email or print out a revised copy at the end of the month. We thank Kathy for all the hard work she put into the directory, as well as Aaron Brodeur, who took many of the photos. We also thank you for your cooperation.
- THE PARISH is sad to say farewell to Alexander Margitich, who is moving to Brooklyn, NY next week. We ask God to protect and bless him in all his endeavors.
- CATECHUMENS: there will be no class on Saturday, February 9, due to the Singing Seminar that day, nor on Saturday, February 16, since Father Lawrence will be attending the lecture given by Bishop Kallistos (Ware) in SF. Catechumens, as well as all parishioners, are encouraged to attend the talks given by Bishop Kallistos, who is surely one of the most well-known, beloved, and articulate Orthodox teachers and authors of the last forty years. Register for his talks at:  
[www.sforthodoxinstitute.org/conferences/102-supplementary/194-feb2013-symposium-sf](http://www.sforthodoxinstitute.org/conferences/102-supplementary/194-feb2013-symposium-sf)

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### RECOMMENDED BOOK

*The Beginning of a Life of Prayer* by Archimandrite Irenei, rector of St. Tikhon Church in San Francisco. This is not "just another" book on praying, but one which calls the reader to take stock of one's spiritual life, priorities and passions, the worldly and demonic influences that assail us, so that one may enter into the fullness of communion with God. Father Irenei's book will instruct and inspire you, and I highly recommend it. At only 122 pages, it is amazing how much he is able to give us. —Fr. Lawrence

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## FEBRUARY 2013

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1  • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Meeting of the Lord	2 – Meeting of the Lord • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and Blessing of candles  • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM, Great Vespers
3 – Sts. Simeon and Anna • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • 12:30 PM, PARISH ANNUAL MEETING	4	5  • 7 PM, Study Group in Rohnert Park	6  • 6 PM, Vespers	7  • 6 PM, Akathist to St. Seraphim	8  <i>Liturgical Singing Seminar here Friday and Saturday</i>  6 PM, Vespers	9  • 8 AM, Divine Liturgy  • 5 PM, Vespers with 2 choirs • LSS Dinner and Wrap-up
10 – St. Haralambos • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 12:45 PM, Bell Ringers Mtg	11	12  • 7 PM, Study Group in Rohnert Park	13 • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy  • 6 PM, Vespers	14  • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship  • 6 PM, Akathist to St. John of SF	15	16  <i>(Metropolitan Kallistos Ware speaking in SF)</i>  • 5 PM, Great Vespers
17 – Zacchaeus Sunday • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	18	19  • 7 PM, Study Group in Rohnert Park	20 • 8:30 AM, Matins & Divine Liturgy  • 6 PM, Vespers	21  • 6 PM, Akathist to St. Seraphim • 7 PM, Parish Council	22	23  • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM, Vigil, beginning of Lenten Triodion Hymns
24 – Tax Collector and Pharisee • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	25	26  Fr. Lawrence in Portland for Mission Retreat  • 7 PM, Study Group in Rohnert Park	27	28	March 1	2  • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM, Vigil

• Please note that Forgiveness Sunday is March 17. The Vespers of Forgiveness will be served after the Agape Meal on that day.