

FEAST OF THE PROTECTION

On October 1 the Church celebrates the feast of the *Protection of the Mother of God*. Our parish is named after this feast day, and so we enthusiastically participate, anticipate, and spiritually delight in the vision which was once seen by St. Andrew, the fool for Christ's sake in the Church of the Blakerni district in Constantinople, on Oct. 1, sometime in the mid-10th century. On that day, while the city of Constantinople was surrounded by enemy forces intent on destruction, the blessed St. Andrew the fool for Christ said to St. Epiphanius: "Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" And the enemy was mysteriously scattered, and the city and the people saved. It may surprise us that we would celebrate a feast based on a vision seen by a man, known as a fool-for-Christ, so very long ago, in a land so far away, in a city no longer Christian. Of course, there have been many visions of the Mother of God praying for the world. Our own St. Seraphim saw the Theotokos on three separate occasions. However, on this feast of October 1 we do not celebrate the vision of St Andrew-the-fool-for-Christ seeing the Virgin holding her veil over the City, we celebrate the fact that what he saw was something about the church, the Body of Christ, something that we too experience when we pray together: the unbreakable and unending bond of the Church both visible and invisible, all the faithful as members of the Lord's Holy Body, the Church. And it is also a confirmation that until the Coming of our Lord—and the resurrection and healing of all creation—all existence beyond the grave, of the righteous and the saints, is one untiring prayer, one ceaseless intercession and mediation, in love. When we sing at the Funeral and Panikhida that "their souls shall dwell with the blessed" this is what we mean. We have become used to imagining that the Holy Theotokos, and all the saints, all the deceased, the entire spiritual world in general—are somewhere over there, far away in the heavens, somehow "upstairs" while we are "downstairs." It is unusual and even difficult for us to believe and the Mother of God and all the saints are so close to us that they can pray together with us in our churches. Do not let go of the chance, dear brethren, to make use of the Theotokos' nearness, and to pray to Her with childish simplicity, loyalty and sincere faith, calling out to Her: "Rejoice, O our Joy, protect us from all evil with Thy most precious veil." (*adapted*)

PARISH MEMBERSHIP

BULLETIN ARTICLES should be interesting, of a spiritual nature, inspiring, challenging, informative or even entertaining. The following important information may present a challenge to read and absorb, but—sad to say—it will not entertain you. The Russian writer Chekov wrote that "The secret of boring people lies in telling them everything." Perhaps this will be too much information, "chloroform in print," as Mark Twain said. But tell you, I must, and I beg you, please forgive me if it is not helpful.

The Diocesan Assembly will take place in Denver on October 2–4. In preparation for that gathering, reports from all the parishes in the Diocese were posted to the Diocesan website at the following internet address: http://dowoca.orthodoxws.com/2012_assembly.html

I ask you to read those reports to see how other parishes are doing and what is going on in the Diocese in general. There is also, FYI, my report as the Chairman of the Department of Liturgy Music, which I hope you will read as well.

More specifically, and regarding our Parish, what is very interesting is that it appears that we—along with Annunciation in Portland, OR.—report that we have the highest parish membership in the Diocese. Both parishes report a formal, financially committed membership of 118 (St. Paul in Las Vegas reports a much higher Sunday attendance, but a lower membership count than ours). You may wonder, how can it be that our formal Parish Membership is only 118 while at the same time our usual Sunday attendance is about 200, and three weeks ago we counted 240 people in Church? Diocesan reports also indicate that since 2007 our Parish has had **0% growth in membership**. Yet, there are new faces all the time in Church. And, didn't we recently rejoice at the baptism of thirteen new Orthodox Christians and look forward to welcoming more? So how can it be that we have 0% growth. Of course, people move away, some fall or drift away, and some repose in the Lord, but obviously, there is something wrong with our parish membership numbers.

Before we address this issue, let me offer you one other piece of information, regarding per capita giving, which I brought up last week. Take a look at page 44 of the **Departmental Reports** which lists "Parish per Capita Financial Support" — our parish is listed as 44 out of 49

INFORMATION

Protection of the Holy Virgin & St. Seraphim of Sarov Church
90 Mountain View Ave, Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Parish office phone: 584-9491 / fax: 585-9445
website: 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. He is available Tues-
day–Saturday, from noon onwards each day.

PARISH CONTACTS

Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Assistant Pastor318-1559
Fr. John Ramos, Attached.....570-9849
Deacon Jeremiah Crawford823-5878
Deacon Nicholas Carr588-8753
Sub-Deacon Marc Richardson545-4047
Nicolas Custer, Choir Director584-9491
Nilus Veenis, Sacristan526-2284
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden.....291-7452
Petar Griovski, Treasurer762-4742
Bonnie Alexander, Recording Secretary778-8528
Lisa Moroz, Sisterhood President.....360-5119
Parmenas Davis, Church School Coordinator.....823-2921
Shenina, Scrip Manager.....321-7417
Eleni Rose, Agape Meal Coordinator480-6106

parishes in giving! For example, San Anselmo’s per member average yearly giving is \$1754, our parish’s annual per member giving averages out to \$973 per member. We ought not to worry too much about that, since the average only calculates *non-building fund* offerings. Many of our weekly contributions are directed to go towards the Parish Building Fund rather than the General operating fund. We would see a sharp increase in the “per capita” average if Building Funds were included in the computation, and since the Building Fund is not assessed by the Diocese, many parishioners do direct their offerings to go toward that category. It all gets a bit complicated here.

Let us also recall that every parish offers a tithe to the Diocese—a bit more than 10% of our Parish yearly budget. This divides out to about \$200 per member. **The entire \$200** goes out of the parish to fund the diocese/central administration, as is our duty and joy to do. Accordingly, this structure prevents our parish from listing as official members those parishioners giving less than the \$200. Such is our current “system,” which I hope will change in the near future from a nonscriptural “head tax” to a true *tithe* to the diocese. Then we can dispense with all this talk about money-per-member, and simply list those who contribute at whatever amount.

Let us also acknowledge the heart-felt offerings of those who are unable to give over \$200 yearly. Their offerings are also precious, as the story in the Gospel of the “Widow’s pennies” so powerfully reminds us (Luke 21:1–4). What each Christian gives is between ourself and the Lord, and no one is to judge, minimize, scrutinize or criticize that amount. I am well aware that some of our most pious, most faithful and loving parishioners are on a fixed income, or no income to speak of. If we have little, then we give from that poverty—and, lo and behold, out of that little God enriches both the gift and the giver. If we have much, then of that bounty we return a portion back to God to bless all of it. Either way, our giving teaches

us to trust in God, not in money. Try giving according to this principle for a month or two or three. **Test it** says our Lord in Micah, and you will see how God will bless you.

So, here we are, listing 118 official members of the Parish only because that is the number of baptized, chrismated, confessing, communing men and women over the age of eighteen **that I know of** who make a thank-offering financial contribution to their parish family on a regular basis. And we rejoice that all of those 118 members give far more than the \$200 tithe we send in to the Diocese, since they are giving in thanksgiving to God. No doubt we have some that give anonymously, but about that, I have no record and so therefore cannot list those names as members.

It is my hope that in the near future we will officially report to the Diocese that our parish has 200 members; not so we might boast about attendance, or that we are the largest parish in the Diocese. It is because that number would reflect the reality that we indeed have close to 200 adults of eighteen years of age or older who are involved and dedicated to the parish community life, who are regularly confessing and communing, who are financially contributing not because they want to “fund the parish budget” or pay the Diocesan tithe, but so that they may be obedient to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and give a portion, whatever size it may be (not all, just a portion) of what God has given them. Please forgive me if any of this is not clear or sounds like an undue focus on money. Our Lord Jesus said “where your treasure is [what you value], there will your heart be also. Let us then treasure the gift of the Church.

—Fr. Lawrence

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **BAPTISMS:** October 6, following Vespers, Annmarie, child of Niki and Freddie Myles to be baptized. The next morning, Sunday, October 7, Tito Vincent Ramirez will be baptized at 9 AM, prior to the Divine Liturgy.
- **WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO SUNDAY,** October 14, when Mica Anastasia Castillo and Tito V. Ramirez will be joined in Holy Matrimony. All are invited to the wedding service. Starts at 5 PM.
- **FUNDRAISER FOR MONASTERY OF SAINT JOHN:** The Parish will host a dinner in support of the Monastery of Saint John of San Francisco (Manton, CA.) on Sunday, October 28. Vespers will be served at 4:30 PM, followed at 5 PM by a dinner (wine included) and a presentation on the monastery by Abbot Meletios (Webber). This being a benefit dinner, and an elegant one at that, tickets will be \$50 per person. The following people will be organizing the event: Lisa Moroz, Debi Buse, Fr. Lawrence and Bonnie Alexander. Tickets will go on sale in the next week. If you would like to volunteer to be a server or help clean after the meal, please see Lisa Moroz.
- **CHOIR MEMBERS:** During the next few weeks you and your Choir Master Nicolas will be discussing what day and time would be most convenient for regular choir rehearsals. It is self-evident that music, blend, intonation, etc. are dependent upon regular rehearsals, something we have not had for some time. The discussion of time and day is important, since you will be asked—as those blessed by me to be Liturgical Singers at the Divine Liturgy—to commit to coming to all rehearsals. In addition to this, Nicolas and I have prepared a set of “Choir Bylaws”—in other words, a list of expectations of the singers, suggested retirement ages and exceptions to that, as well as requirements for those interested in joining the choir. I pray that all this will be helpful and positive for the choir.
- **HOLY DORMITION PARISH** is holding an “Old Time Harvest Festival” on Saturday, October 6, from High Noon to 8 PM. There will be music and dance, archery, horse rides, games, barbeque and crafts. For more information call 545-5688. Holy Dormition is located at 1521 Rose Ave, Santa Rosa.
- **SAINT NICHOLAS CHURCH** in San Anselmo will hold their Annual Bazaar on October 6, from 10:30 AM to 3 PM, Vespers at 4 PM. Enjoy traditional slavic foods, crafts, and the parish choir concert at 1 PM.
- **THE ROHNERT PARK STUDY GROUP** will start up again on Tuesday, October 23, at 7 PM. The topic of study for this series of talks will (not in this order) the Scriptures and the Coming of the Messiah, the Scriptures and the Holy Liturgy, the Scriptures and the Cross, etc. Discussions take place at Debi Shrimplin’s apartment, 1352 Oak View Circle, #307, (707) 536-9112.
- **THE REDWOOD GOSPEL MISSION** is gearing up for their Wednesday before Thanksgiving Dinner, and is looking for volunteers. Serge Anderson will be working with them to determine what kind of help they need, and will be asking for parish participation.
- **ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31,** the Church school will host a parish Harvest Party for the kids. Akathist to the Angels at 5 PM, followed by games, crafts and dinner. Please see Gloria Collins for more info.

CURE FOR GOSSIP AND JUDGING

St. Philotheos of Sinai says: “Silence your tongue, even though the intellect (nous) itself may not yet be still.” This reminds me of a popular urban proverb: “Don’t put your mouth in gear when your mind is still in neutral.” Then there is this wonderful old Italian proverb: “From listening comes wisdom, from speaking repentance.” A spiritual father once said to me: “Take a lesson from the holy icons. The subjects always have their mouths closed!” — *Archpriest Basil Rhodes*

GRATITUDE

It is impossible to know God and not give Him thanks—because in knowing God all our life is transfigured into thanksgiving, a thanksgiving to Him for Jesus Christ, and “for all those things we we know, and which we know not, whether manifest or unseen”. “Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name.” May God grant that these words be not just on our lips, but in our hearts too. One pastor wrote that Christian Stewardship is about the vigilant use of time, talent and treasure, embracing these gifts both with a sense of gratitude for the blessings that ultimately derive from God; and an openness to share our treasure beyond our immediate and essential concerns. —*anonymous*

CHURCH SHOPPING ~ Fr. John Dresko

*Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighbourhood looking for a church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches. — C.S. Lewis, **The Screwtape Letters**, Chapter 16*

For the past number of months, we have been studying **The Screwtape Letters** in our adult class. In this classic treatise of spiritual life and how the Devil and his angels use all sorts of tricks and subversions to tempt us away from God, one of the most troubling tricks mentioned is that of “Church Shopping.” This phenomenon is not limited to the deeply spiritual mind and literary imagination of C.S. Lewis, but is a well-known temptation experienced in the Church since the dawn of time.

Church Shopping takes place at many different levels of spiritual life. It might begin as a genuine search of true faith in a family or a personal life devoid of faith. It might begin as a movement away from falsehood to Truth. It might begin as a movement to a parish where you experience the embrace of the One for whom you have been looking and who has reciprocated that search. It might begin as a movement away from a Church that no longer answers your questions with “truth” and to the One True Church.

All of the seeds of Church Shopping have innocence and purity at their heart. But almost always the devil begins to pervert that innocence and purity. There are two great perversions to the search for Christ and His Church that turn an honest search for Him and His Kingdom into a caricature, a distortion almost invisible to the eye and certainly invisible to those not seeking with purity of heart. Inevitably, it starts with a decided lack of desire for Truth, and Truth is not just a fact, a what. Truth is a person and it is He alone that we should search for in our efforts. Every single breath, every single effort, every single search should be to fulfill His desires. But that simply does not happen for many.

The first great perversion of the search for Truth that turns it into mere Church Shopping is the desire to find the one place that meets my desires. This takes many forms. “I simply can't pray with those people.” “I need a different language.” “I can't believe that they use the New Calendar.” “I need a parish with more openness towards my sexuality.” “I need a parish with a pastor who will help me find my life partner, not insist that we live apart until marriage.” “I need more young people.”

“I need no pews.” “I need pews.” And on and on and on...

This perversion changes the living Body of Christ given to us by the Lord into a group therapy, or worse yet, the local Elks club. We look at the Church and the local parish as existing to help me with my problems and difficulties. In addition, it must provide something clear and helpful in making me “feel” holy and peaceful. This perversion leads us to forget that we come to the Church to encounter Christ and His Truth, not the other way around. The Lord desires us with all His heart and grieves deeply when we reject Him. But He doesn't “need” us to exist Himself. On the other hand, we could not take our next breath without His knowledge and permission. We forget that when we judge and dismiss those in the life of the Church, because He's the One who placed them there.

Our desire to have a parish “more in line with my thinking” means that we will never be at home in any parish or even Church. The lack of humility that allows me to approach God and find out if He offers what “I need” paradoxically means that He will never be able to offer that because I am blind to seeing it. Our lack of humility does not allow us to see that where God planted us is the best field in which we can grow. So we uproot ourselves, go off to someone or somewhere else where I can be “better cared for,” only to be disappointed in that shortly thereafter. We don't see that the Church, the parish, the pastor, the people, the whatever, is not the problem. We are.

The second great perversion of the search for Truth that turns it into mere Church Shopping is despair at the “current state of things.” This is closely attached to the first perversion because it also springs from my ego.

We have been buffeted with some very strong shock waves in the life of the Church the past few years. We are going to elect yet another Primate in a few months after Metropolitan Jonah's resignation. Three living former Primates. Clergy accused of various forms of misconduct. And in our own parish we have recently seen a son of our parish, baptized into the Faith here, sent off to seminary from here, ordained to the Holy Priesthood at our altar, simply walk away after one year. He left the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Bride of Christ, whom he promised to serve the rest of his life, for a mistress. All of this can make one look at things and say, “It's got to be better somewhere else.” How can this be the One, Holy,

Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Bride of Christ, when all these things happen, by leaders?

The answer is simple, though. The Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The very Bride of Christ. And our parish is the local expression of that reality. But God has placed that divine reality into the hands of sinful human beings. Weak human beings. Broken human beings. And we all bring those sins, that brokenness, to the life of the parish and the Church. But it doesn't matter where we go, because we would have to work our way through all of that flotsam and jetsam no matter where we went.

We also forget the spiritual reality that very often God al-

lows struggles and difficulties to be in our lives — individual, parish and Church — in order to strengthen us, allow us to be humble and love those whom we may find difficult to love, and teach us that He is God, not us.

Fr. Thomas Hopko one time told me a great truth: “The hardest thing for man to do is grow where God plants him.” Take your pick — St. Paul’s, the OCA, the Orthodox Church — it doesn’t matter. As long as we seek anything other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified, not anything else, not anything that will “help me,” not anything that appeals to my “tastes,” we are doomed to continually wander the earth looking for the perfect place. The perfect place does exist — it’s where God planted me.

FROM ELDER PAISIOS, MONK OF MOUNT ATHOS:

Some people tell me that they are scandalized because they see many things wrong in the Church. I tell them that if they ask a fly: “Are there any flowers in this area?” it will say: “I don’t know about flowers, but over there in the heap of rubbish you can find all the filth you want.” And it will go on to list all the unclean things it has been to. Now, if you ask a honeybee: “Have you seen any unclean things in this area?” it will reply: “Unclean things? No, I have not seen any; the place here is full of the most fragrant flowers.” And it will go on to name all the flowers of the garden or the meadow. You see, the fly only knows where the unclean things are, while the honeybee knows where the beautiful iris or the hyacinth is. As I have come to understand, some people resemble the honeybee and some resemble the fly. Those who resemble the fly seek to find evil in every circumstance and are preoccupied with it; they see no good anywhere. But those who resemble the honeybee only see the good in everything they see. The stupid person thinks stupidly and takes everything in the wrong way, whereas the person who has good thoughts, no matter what he sees, no matter what you tell him, maintains a positive and good thought.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Our Parish Sunday School classes begin on Sunday, September 30. Classes as follows:

- Gloria Collinspreschool–2nd gradeLarge Sunday School Room
- Amy Ramirez Margitich & Joe Anderson3rd–5th gradeProtection Church
- Sam Coon & Parmenas Davis6th–8th gradeUpstairs at St. Seraphim
- Dana Ames & Garrett Paul HamnerHigh SchoolParish Office

Substitute teachers are Vicky Basch, Serge Anderson, Vincent Rossi, Fred Krueger

Our teachers are committed to teaching the students each and every week, and the lessons they teach will carry over from week to week. **Parents!** we therefore ask you to also commit to bringing your children to Church and to the Church School every Sunday.

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

OCTOBER 2012

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
September 30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 5 PM, VIGIL 	1 - Protection Feast 9:30 AM Parish Feast Day Divine Liturgy followed by Festal Meal	2 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;"> Fr. Lawrence in Denver at Diocesan Assembly </div>	3	4	5	6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers • 6 PM, Baptism of Annmarie Myles
7 - St. Sergius and Bacchus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Baptism of Tito Vincent Ramirez • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal 	8	9	10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Catechism • 6 PM, Vespers for the Synaxis of the Optina Elders 	11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:30 AM, Matins & Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Optina Elders 	12	13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers & Confessions
14 - Fathers of the 7th Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 5 PM, Castillo/Ramirez Wedding & Reception 		16	17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Catechism • 6 PM, Vespers for Holy Apostle Luke 	18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Akathist to St. Seraphim 	19	20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Great Vespers & Confessions
21 - St. Hilarion the Great <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal 	22	23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group 	24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Catechism • 6 PM, Vespers 	25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting 	26 - St. Demetrios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy 	27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Great Vespers & Confessions
28 - St. Job of Pochaev <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Confessions • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 4:30 PM, <i>Vespers & Monastery Benefit Dinner*</i> 	29	30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group 	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Akathist to the Angels, Harvest Party for kids 	November 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Akathist to St. Seraphim 	2	3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, VIGIL

* Sunday, October 28, 4:30 PM, *Vespers & Benefit Dinner for the Monastery of St. John in Manton. Fr. Meletios (Webber), Guest Speaker*