

# THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

February 2019, Vol. 27, Issue 2

## THE SUNDAY EXPERIENCE

ONE DRIVES ONTO the parish grounds, and depending on the time observes ample parking space spread out over the acreage. Walking over to St. Seraphim Cathedral across the gravel road I am always struck by the majesty of the Temple; the sense of ecclesiastical history and tradition is very apparent. This is obviously a very serious parish which knows from where it has come and to where it is going. The gold cross on top of the dome glistens in the early morning sunlight and, in a wonderful metaphorical touch, quite often there is a Morning Dove perched on the upper bar. The tall wooden front doors are respectfully imposing, especially with the addition of the gilded panels. The icon over the entrance serves notice; it takes a conscious purpose to open those doors and walk inside; flippantly enter into this space at your own risk. The exterior appearance does not invite flights of mental, emotional, psychic fantasy or whimsy. Everything speaks to the fact that this is going to be a sober and unique experience and if you're not ready for that it might be better to turn around and go to the local sports bar and catch the early NFL game (not that football is a bad thing, I love football. But at 10 AM in front of St. Seraphim on a Sunday morning the raucous allure of the coliseum seems to quickly vanish and a self-imposed holy silence seems like a really good idea). Something important is about to happen inside here.

The Narthex can be a somewhat perplexing experience, especially if one is not familiar with icons and the effect on the subconscious. Christ looks down from the east in a pose of blessing; He is not quite smiling, but He is obviously friendly and inviting one in further. If one is not totally stunned at this juncture and has a sense of good-natured curiosity, and begins to look about, you can't help but notice there are icons everywhere. It is at this point I imagine doctrinaire Protestants and other iconoclasts might begin to become somewhat uneasy, defensive, perhaps even agitated. I remember an experience I had years ago with someone of this persuasion who stood just inside the entrance to the nave and complained that the overt Byzantine ambience made him want to run away. When I asked him, "And to where does it make you want to run?" he didn't answer, although I admit I was thinking that the easy anonymity of the coliseum must seem so very comforting about now. But then there was

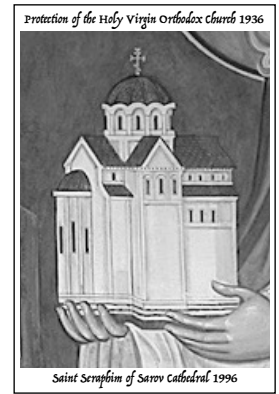
that Muslim girlfriend of one of my sons who found the experience so very touching and later asked many questions about architecture, liturgy, theology, history, and icons. She was especially

attracted to icons of the Theotokos and repeated the word Theotokos several times with a smile playing on her lips.

...but back to the narthex. It is a little small, at least in comparison to the church exterior, and at first glance, seems somewhat dark. There are only those two small windows above one's head on either side of the doors, but after examination one discovers the darkness is, as is everything at St. Seraphim, intentional. The light glowing through the entrance into the nave beckons, "Come inside; trust me, you'll like it."

The narthex proper, depending on the time, can be full of motion and activity, even hectic; purchasing candles, socializing with friends, light-hearted, friendly banter are in abundance. One person said that when the choir enters into the narthex from pre-liturgy practice in the Protection Church, it is nearly impossible to make one's way into the nave. She calls it the "bottleneck." Of course, this is at 9:58 AM, and herein is an implicit message: *Arrive early if you want to complete your veneration unencumbered.* Orthodox literature is on display, not a lot of it, a hand-out for the service, a larger monthly pamphlet, a basket with scarves, stairs to the south, a wooden donation box are also to be seen. There are several greeters. Obvious visitors were politely engaged, asked several very appropriate questions, and made to feel, I thought, welcomed. Honestly, I was quite proud of the way our greeters represented our church.

It is an utterly stunning experience to walk into the nave of St. Seraphim, and this from someone who has visited many Orthodox churches in the US and abroad. It is a unique experience, incredibly beautiful and engaging, and is only enhanced if one has both an open heart and an even slightly developed artistic sensibility. Again, I am always awed when I enter the nave and begin my veneration. Also, it appears to me—although I shouldn't be looking—that most people are attentive and even piously engaged. But then, everything has been orchestrated to engage the senses; the iconography, the music, the incense,



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### Parish Contacts

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the rhythmic flow of the dialogue between the altar and the choir. There is an overwhelming sense of preparation; nothing happens by accident.

A Catholic friend of mine once complained that he wished the Orthodox priests faced the congregation during the service, especially during the *Anaphora*, and I realized this was going to necessitate a long conversation involving a healthy critique of Vatican II. I have heard from some parishioners, more so recently, that the younger children in church, toddlers and younger are oftentimes distracting and disruptive, and while sensitive to that problem, I am so thankful that the church actually has children. I remember the days when there were only four children in the parish. I imagine this “problem” is at least partially one of perspective and historical memory. The parishioners certainly need to exercise loving patience, and parents need to be sensitive to the effects of noise and movement on the part of their children. And all of that is much easier said than done.

I continually wonder what it must have been like in Hagia Sophia in eighth century Constantinople. In Russia, Georgia, Serbia, Romania, and elsewhere, churches are typically packed like a sardine can on Sunday mornings, and there is little to no collateral noise. Some of this is certainly culturally based; it seems to be the

case that Eastern European children are much more self-contained than their American counterparts. I would be willing to bet most of this self-control is the end result of 1700 years of Church Tradition. There are certain things one does, and does not do, in a Church, and one tends to learn these things over the course of seventeen centuries. We are definitely working on that aspect at St. Seraphim. My guess is it will be different ten years from now.

I often arrive at the parish hall ten or fifteen minutes after the conclusion of the service. The food has already been blessed, there is a noisy hum of conversation and the sense of action and motion. Parents and most younger children are eating outside, the children frolicking, running, yelling, playing. There have been surprisingly few serious mishaps. The food served in the parish hall is always good. I’ve never had a bad or even mediocre meal at St. Seraphim. There is a very conscious attempt to cater to various dietary necessities.

People are engaged in a variety of conversations, most of it civilized. Even during the most rancorous days of the 2016 Presidential election I didn’t observe what I would term any overtly hostile conversation. But then I imagine most people merely sought out the like-minded. But this does point to a minor issue. People do tend to congregate with the familiar and the like-minded, even consistently sitting in the same areas. I think this unconscious “territorial imperative” is being addressed. More and more, clergy and people are moving about the parish hall, seeking guests and strangers, engaging in conversation with those who are unfamiliar. The clergy table is less exclusively black, and this is a good very good thing indeed. We do not want to project an air of exclusivity or cliquishness. This is very off putting and although it has been very rare in my experience in Orthodox Churches, I have heard of it happening in the more ethnic churches. I don’t believe this is an issue at St. Seraphim. The parish is renowned for its hospitable vibe. Of course we always need to extend ourselves to others, be open and friendly, and most importantly willing to listen. I observe many people moving around amongst the tables, interacting, and I don’t think this is rare or particularly unusual. There seems to be a conscious effort to go out of one’s way to be hospitable and one does not have to be ordained to do this. True, not everyone is like Fr. Michael Margitich, but we can all learn to extend ourselves to others.

I believe our Sunday experience at St. Seraphim is a uniquely uplifting, spiritual, pro-social experience, a wonderful slice of a time in the life of a Christian community aware of its responsibility to attempt to be all things to all people. I always miss St. Seraphim when I am away for short or long periods and always look forward to returning.

—A parish member, 2017

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **CONFESSIONS ON FRIDAYS:** Unless the Calendar indicates otherwise, I will be available on Fridays to hear confessions from 11:30 AM–1 PM. No appointment needed. –Fr. Lawrence
- **CHURCH CLEANING SIGN-UP SHEET:** A new sign-up sheet has been posted on the Church bulletin board, next to the stairs. If every parish family will sign up to clean our Church, all will be able to participate in the grace of the prayer: “O Lord, bless those who love the beauty of Thy House.”
- **ANGELS UNAWARES:** On the first Thursday of the month—February 7—our parish welcomes guests from the Redwood Gospel Mission, hosting about twenty or so needy folks for dinner and providing a place to sleep for the night. Guests will arrive about 6 PM, departure about 6:30 AM the next morning. Michael and Rachel Dovey are the coordinator, and ask for volunteers. Call them at (707) 799-4117 if you have any questions. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them who suffer adversity...” (Hebrews 13)
- **THE PARISH MEN’S GROUP** will have a breakfast on Saturday, Feb. 9 at 8 AM, in the Parish Hall, and then get to work at the Parish Work Party. Our tasks will be to evaluate what Glendi equipment to save, sell or give away.
- **WORK PARTY:** Saturday, February 9, 9 AM. We will take a crack at making our storage building a bit more user-friendly. Churches should not be hoarders. Come and enjoy the fellowship of working together.
- **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** is held on the second Wednesday each month—Feb. 13. Volunteers, please arrive around 5 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach to the community. Come and participate.
- **THE SENIOR AND RETIRED LUNCH** fellowship will gather on Thursday, February 14. All our retired and senior parish members are invited.

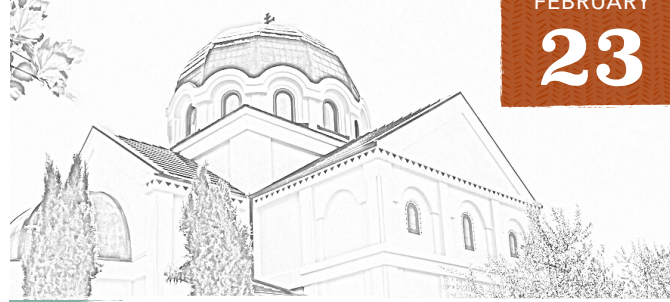
### ON CHURCH ETIQUETTE

When we enter the Church we make the sign of the Cross in an unhurried manner, bow towards the Holy Altar saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” We might, and should, purchase some candles and place them on the stands as we venerate the Holy Icons. We greet our spiritual friends and guides, the saints, who are depicted on the icons.

Always come to Church for the beginning of the Service. If for some serious reason you happen to be late, try not to disturb the prayer of those who have come earlier. Please wait to enter the Church during the following times: if the clergy are coming out for the Little Entrance (don’t get “caught” in the procession as some have); during the Epistle and Gospel; the Cherubic Hymn, the Eucharistic Canon (i.e. from *Let us stand aright, let us stand with fear, let us attend...* until *It is Truly Meet to Bless Thee, O Theotokos...*); the Lord’s Prayer.

What are the parishioners to do when they see the deacon and/or priest are walking through the church incensing the icons? They continue to face toward the Holy Altar and pray.

FEBRUARY  
**23**




## The Konevets Quartet in Concert

### St. Seraphim Orthodox Church

5 PM: Sung Vespers in the Church (no charge)  
 7 PM: Concert of Russian Liturgical and Folk singing in the Parish Hall

Complementary wine, beverages  
 cheese and finger foods

**\$15 Adult**  
**\$10 all Ages Under 17**



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# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## FEBRUARY 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<b>FEBRUARY 1</b>  • 5 PM, Confessions • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple	<b>2 - Meeting of the Lord</b> • <b>9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy, Children's Choir to sing</b>  • 5 PM, Great Vespers
<b>3 - Sts Simeon and Anna</b> • 8:40 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • <b>12:30 PM, Annual Parish Membership Meeting</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>  <i>[Fr. L in SF all day for Diocesan Council Mtg]</i> • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and Talk on <i>Genesis</i>	<b>7</b>  • 6 PM, <i>Angels Unawares</i> guest arrive for dinner	<b>8</b>  • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions	<b>9 - WORK PARTY DAY</b> • 8 AM, Men's Group Breakfast at Church • 9 AM, Work Party • 5 PM, Great Vespers • <i>6:30 PM, Youth Group get together at Basch's</i>
<b>10 - Zacchaeus Sunday</b> • 8:40 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>  • 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and Talk on <i>The Creation of Man</i>	<b>14</b>  • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship	<b>15</b>  • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions	<b>16</b>  • 5 PM, Great Vespers
<b>17 - Publican and Pharisee</b> • 8:40 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal	<b>18</b>  <b>FAST FREE WEEK</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>  • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and Talk on <i>The Age of the World</i>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>  • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions	<b>23</b>  • 3:30 PM, Catechism, <i>On Holy Baptism</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers sung by the Konevets Choir • 7 PM, Concert by the Konevets Choir
<b>24 - Prodigal Son Sunday</b> • 8:40 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal • <i>1 PM, Floral Decoration workshop (see Denise P)</i>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>  • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	<b>27</b>  • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy, Feast of St. Raphael of Brooklyn  • 6 PM, Vespers	<b>28</b>	<b>March 1</b>  • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions	<b>2 - Memorial Saturday</b> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy  • 3:30 PM, Catechism, <i>On Holy Chrismation</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers