

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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A SIGN OF UNITY

...I DON'T KNOW who first coined the phrase "closed communion," but I am certain it was not one of the Church Fathers. It is likely quite modern. This in itself might be enough to give me pause in using it. But it seems also to contain an inherent bias and implicit agenda much like other recent secular creations invented to put a positive spin on an old sin, e.g. "pro-choice," "marriage equality" (who in their right mind could be against choice or equality?!).

Especially in America today, the word "closed" carries negative connotations. One of the worst accusations possible is that of "closed-mindedness." A politically correct culture will not tolerate anyone or anything that is closed, for to be so is *de facto* "bigoted" and "intolerant." Therefore closed communion—referring to the long-standing tradition of communing only those who are members of a unified body—is becoming an ecclesial "sin." Ironically, most of us would admit that a healthy society is built upon "closed" marriage.

The point here is that the expression "closed communion" is not an adequate or faithful description of the ecclesiology [meaning, teaching about the Church] that undergirds the traditional practice of communion. For in reality there is no such thing as "open" or "closed" communion—there is either communion or there is not. In other words, either there exists a communion of faith expressed in a common understanding of doctrine and worship, sacramental and spiritual practice, or such communion does not exist.

Communion is not only a matter between the Lord and me, it is an act of communion with Christ in community. When I receive Holy Communion I also unite myself with a body of believers and with their doctrinal

teaching, worship, life of discipline, and leadership. In partaking of Holy Communion we give ourselves in marriage to a particular body, a specific faith community with a real history and tradition, embodying a real set of beliefs and practices that express those beliefs. We also unite ourselves to all the true members of that particular communion, past, present, and future. Put simply, we become a "member" of that church.

Communion is not only a vertical act of union, i.e. with Christ; it is also horizontal, it unites us with those gathered together as church. Holy Communion is not a "generic" sacrament, disconnected from its ecclesial context. It is the sacrament of a specific and concrete community, united by a specific polity, theology, morality, worship, and spirituality.

According to the historic Christian teaching reflected in the early Church Fathers, admittance to Holy Communion means embracing the entire faith tradition of the body. Before Holy Communion can be received, communion must already be achieved.

The Christian Church, like Her Lord, is not an imaginary and invisible abstraction. The tradition of any church is concrete and visible, expressed throughout history by real people in a tangible continuum of faith and practice (whether for 2,000 years or 2 years). Like the Holy Trinity, the Church is a community, a real communion expressed and embodied by a shared faith and way of life. The maintenance of real communion necessitates borders and boundaries, both doctrinal and disciplinary. If a church is to be faithful to its own tradition, the door will be opened to some things and closed to others.



THE PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN

OUR PARISH IS NAMED after the Protection of the Theotokos, celebrated on October 1. Vigil will be served on Sept. 30 at 6:15 PM in St. Seraphim Cathedral, and the Divine Liturgy will be served on October 1 at 9:30 AM in the Protection Church. While neither Archbishop Benjamin nor Bishop Daniel will be with us for this feast we do expect area clergy to join us for the festivities and the Agape Meal to follow.

Parish of the Protection of the Holy Virgin
St. Seraphim of Sarov Cathedral
90 Mountain View Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Parish office phone: 707-584-9491
website: www.saintseraphim.com

The Rector, Fr. Lawrence Margitich, may be reached at the
Parish office phone, or at Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net.

Parish Contacts

Bobbi Griovski, Parish Secretary	584-9491
Fr. John Schettig	318-1559
Fr. Nicholas Carr	318-5391
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden	291-7452
Martin Thong, Treasurer	888-7888
Adriel Scarborough, Recording Secretary	479-0837
Eleni Rose, Agape Meal Coordinator	480-6106
Debbie Buse, Hall Event Manager	696-4986

Those who characterize the traditional practice as “closed communion” may forget that a church’s communion of faith, and by extension its sacrament, is actually open to all who formally embrace it and unite themselves to it. This is certainly true of the Orthodox Church. It is “closed” only in the way a marriage or a family is closed. While love and hospitality are extended, there are reasonable limits to that hospitality, without which there is no real marriage or family.

A door that is always open is not a door any more. A marriage that is open is not a marriage any more. It is for good reasons that doors swing open and closed. The principles of integrity and monogamy depend upon it.

Few of us would walk into a stranger’s house, head for the refrigerator and help ourselves to a midday snack. Still fewer would demand to be served that snack by the head of the household. The practice and expectation of “open communion” is a very modern phenomenon without precedence throughout most of Church history. It is founded upon a new ecclesiology unknown to the great Fathers and Saints of the Church. It reflects a loss of the mindset that faithfully preserved the Christian tradition that many of us cherish. And it places us in danger; danger of an imaginary church,

an imaginary faith, and an imaginary Christ that will some day disappear from our imaginations altogether.

It is tragic that Christendom is rife with real divisions. Yet by denying this reality we deny ourselves the opportunity and the possibility of the pursuit of truth and conviction. We become the man who never actually buys the cow because he gets the milk for free. Holy Communion has never been free. The Eucharist, and real communion, comes with the price of monogamy, of standing for and within a tangible faith community and tradition.

In *Mere Christianity*, which C. S. Lewis wrote only to bring skeptics and seekers to the doorstep of Christian faith, he leaves the reader standing in the hall “out of which doors open into several rooms.” In his analogy the “rooms” are the existing church communions. He makes it clear to the reader that he must eventually choose a room, for the hall (a belief in the basic Christian principles) is not “an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions.” Lewis’ point is that Christians are in the business of monogamy. There is no generic “Christianity,” there never has been. There is only the practice of Christianity with a church body. And there is no church communion called “Mere Christianity.” There are church bodies with real histories, real dogmas (whether consciously recognized or not), and real tradition. As Lewis conveys, we cannot “play church” in the hallway imagining we are really in one of the rooms.

We must seek, ask, knock, and prayerfully make a choice of what tradition we can marry in good faith. And our decision must be made on conviction of truth and authenticity, not on convenience, emotion, or even personal tastes. As Lewis put it: “...you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling.” [11] Without this, my communion is ultimately with “me, myself, and I,” not with the historical Christ, the apostles, and saints. — *Father Michael Shanbour, excerpts from an article*

ANGELS UNAWARES ~ October 3:

The **Angels Unawares** program starts up again next week (see Hebrews 13: *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...*)

Guests will arrive about 6 PM, departure about 6:30 AM. Michael and Rachel Dovey are the coordinators for the program this year. Volunteers are needed for the October 3 kick-off from 4–8 PM. Any questions call Michael or Rachel Dovey at (707) 799-4117.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THE MEN'S GROUP has a get-together on Tuesday, October 1, at 6 PM, at Hen House on Bellevue Ave.
- ALTAR SERVERS: You are invited to a brief workshop on Altar Serving on Saturday, October 5, from 11 AM–1 PM. Lunch will be included.
- THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK is held on the second Wednesday of each month—October 9. Volunteers, please arrive around 5 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach. Come and participate.
- MASTER PLANNING UPDATE: A short meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 10 at 6 PM.
- TRAVELS: I will be going on two trips this month. First, the Diocesan Assembly will be held at Holy Theophany Orthodox Church in Colorado Spring, from October 15-17. The Diocesan Assembly is the gathering of all the parish representatives and clergy in the Diocese of the West for church services and organizational meetings. Secondly, I will go on a pilgrimage to Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain as it is called, departing here the evening of October 20 and returning on November 1. I ask for your prayers and blessing for these trips. —Fr. Lawrence
- CHRISTMAS PLAY: Rehearsals for the Christmas Play (scheduled for December 15) will begin on Saturday, October 19 at 3 PM. For more information about the play, speak with Esther Carr or Gloria Collins.
- SENIOR LUNCH: Our retired and senior parishioners are invited to enjoy lunch in the Parish Hall with each other at Noon on October 24.
- EMMA ANDERSON is once again organizing a Holiday Bazaar for Saturday, November 30. More info to follow soon.

FEAST OF THE PROTECTION, OCTOBER 1

WHEN WE CELEBRATE the Feast of the Protection On Monday and Tuesday we will boldly approach the Theotokos to thank her, to ask her continued intercessions and to honor her. We approach the “Wine bowl pouring forth joy” to receive Christ; we stand before the “table laden with an abundance of mercies” and we are enlightened by the “Mystic Day” Who is our Lord Jesus. Let us do these things worthily, in a spirit of deep and joyful repentance. Let us, like Mary, choose “the good part.” To do that, I encourage each of you to prepare for the Feast by Confession, and receive Holy Communion. Since Holy Communion is a work of the Church, and not an individualistic and private spiritual matter at all—we are *members of one another* in the Church—I ask of all of you: *Clergy and Servers*—make your Confession so that when you serve in the Altar, you will do so with clean hands, “a pure heart, with a good conscience and with faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1:5). *Church Singers*—Confess and prepare for Communion, so that the words you sing, the prayers you utter, will come from pure lips and pure hearts and a clean conscience. *Holy People of God*—you and your children, make a Confession and prepare for Communion for this feast, so that all of us, together, can say with confidence: “Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place? He that is innocent in his hands and pure in heart...” Only repentance through Confession, not time, will grant this gift from God. And then, when we are communing of the Lord’s Body and Blood, we are in Jesus Christ. This union with God in the Liturgy makes us into a holy people (isn’t this holiness and unity one of the reasons that the Parish exists?). Another great miracle then occurs: the parish members from the founding in 1936 until today, are joined together in Jesus Christ in one song of praise together with all the saints and the whole Church, under the Protecting Veil of the Theotokos; for in Christ, all are alive and united. **Confessions can be heard either before, during or after services, or by appointment.** —*Father Lawrence*

HONORING THE SAINTS

THE SAINT SERAPHIM CHURCH SCHOOL warmly invites you to our 5th Annual *Honoring the Saints* party on Sunday, October 27. We will sing the Akathist to St. Seraphim at 4:30 PM in Protection Church, then gather in the Parish Hall at 5 PM for dinner and crafts. All ages are welcome, and asked to come dressed as a saint. This event is a wonderful opportunity to develop greater understanding and knowledge of the lives of the saints while deepening our reverence for them. More information will be posted next week. Any questions, speak with Adriel or Gloria.

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

OCTOBER 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	30 • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Protection of the Theotokos	1 – Protection Feast • 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy and Festal Lunch • 6 PM, Men's Group at Hen House	2 • 6 PM, Vespers	3 • 6 PM, Angels Unawares Meal	4	5 • 11 AM, Altar Server Training • 5 PM, Great Vespers
6 – St. Innocent of Alaska • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	7	8	9 • 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers	10 • 6 PM, Master Planning Meeting	11 • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Optina Elders	12 • 5 PM, Vespers
13 – Holy Fathers, 7th Council • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 1 PM, Teacher Meeting	14	15 <div>Fr. Lawrence in Colorado Springs for Diocesan Assembly</div>	16 • 6 PM, Vespers	17	18	19 – Memorial Saturday • 9 AM, Memorial Divine Liturgy (Protection Church) • 5 PM, Vespers
20 – Righteous Child Artemy • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	21 <div>Fr Lawrence on pilgrimage to Mount Athos, returning Nov. 1</div>	22	23 • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and Bible Study	24 • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	25 • 6 PM, Great Vespers with Lity fort St. Demetrios	26 – St. Demetrios • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy (Youth Choir Feast Day) • 5 PM, Vespers
27 – Martyr Nestor • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 4:30 PM, Honoring the Saints	28	29	30 • 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck and Bible Study	31	NOVEMBER 1	2 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On the True God</i> • 5 PM, Vespers