

Rector's Report
Father John Tomasi
July 25, 2010

The past year has brought about significant changes in our parish. A year ago, we began the negotiating process of leaving the Motor Avenue location. In the summer of 2009, Fr. Mathew Tate and Fr. Ian McKinnen came to assess the viability of our mission; 50 people attended a weekday meeting, which impressed both Fr. Mathew and Fr. Ian. From that point until now, our church has experienced a rebirth. Not only were we able to negotiate ourselves out of the lease on Motor Avenue, but by God's grace, we were able to find a new, larger facility at less than half the rent.

Finding the location was only the first part of the miracle. We had very little money and most everybody was working, so we were not sure how we would renovate the building to open as a church by December 1, 2009. Again, the parish pulled together and helped us move from Motor Avenue and renovate our current building. This, of course, would have been impossible without the help of our congregation, and especially that of Christopher (Rick) Jensen and his family. Rick desired to become part of the Orthodox Church as he participated in the building of the temple itself. We moved out of the Motor Avenue by December 1, and were able to hold our first services in the new facility on Thanksgiving 2009.

The bookstore opened on December 1, and we soon discovered that many of our friends from our original Washington Blvd. location rediscovered us and were happy to find that we were back on the map again. Not only did we have to deal with the physical aspects of moving, but the diocese was also asking us to comply with background checks for all of our youth workers. This coincided with our Sunday School program that is being run by Ivana and Kostas Holiastos. Since September 2009, we have done background checks for six people, and have more who are willing to help out as the needs arise. What may appear to be small steps on a historical basis are major steps for us now, and having a Sunday School in place makes our parish life more complete.

Liturgically, we have managed to maintain weekday and weekend services on a regular basis. We were blessed in June 2010 with an archpastoral visit from His Grace, Bishop Benjamin. At that time, he tonsured Brad Given and Giorgio Tomasi to the position of reader and he ordained Marc Matloff to the position of subdeacon. The three readers are now dividing up the weekday and weekend services so that the burden of setting up and reading the many services less taxing on any one individual.

The church at this time provides both a weekly Bible Study class and an "Orthodox Studies in the Faith" class. In this past year, we have had three child baptisms, one adult baptism, one marriage, and currently we have several catechumens. We hosted a Christmas concert and three fundraising dinners, and look forward to making these annual Church events. New families are attending our church and it seems that every Sunday we are meeting new people who have just discovered us. The Parish Council has met faithfully on a monthly basis, and has taken responsibility for the functioning of the parish. Lydia Tomasi-Given has done a wonderful job with the choir. On any given Sunday, people come to me and comment on how good the choir is and how beautiful the music sounds. James Duncan, our Treasurer, and Marc Matloff, the bookkeeper, have done a phenomenal job of helping us manage our money throughout the financial crises. Reader David McAtee has faithfully taken care of and further developed the development of the parish's website and Facebook account. No special occasion or Sunday would be complete without the wonderful work of Mylena and Victor. Since we moved into our new location, Mylena has prepared many meals for Sundays, baptisms, birthdays, weddings, and special occasions. Victor also has taken much care to ensure that the church is clean and that the flowers in the planter box are always beautiful. Liz Cadigan became the Parish Council secretary and has done a very good job. So many others have helped in many ways that it is impossible to mention them all in this report. I believe that God is blessing our efforts here on the Westside of Los Angeles, and I know that as a group we are dedicated to standing our ground until the Second Coming of Christ.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all of you for your prayers for my family and for the mission.

Committee & Auxiliary Organization Reports

Building and Grounds - Brad Given

Building and Grounds has had a productive year in the church overseeing such major projects as the parish move and reconstruction. While the committee is currently at suboptimal membership due to members pursuing other opportunities, it has not stopped us from entering the planning phase on several projects as well as continuing to review and revise the parish's maintenance needs and work allocations. Moving forward we hope to develop plans to increase our usable space and maximize the potential of our home here on the Westside.

Events & Publications - Lydia Tomasi-Given

The Events and Publications committee is responsible for any event that takes place at the church and maintaining publications, such as the monthly calendar and parish directory. There have been several successful fundraisers over the last year. For the most part, the money that we have raised has gone to the beautification of the church and supporting our priest. We have established several annual events that continue to foster a sense of community. Our 10th Anniversary is in November, which is our current project.

Music - Lydia Tomasi-Given

The Joy of All Who Sorrow Choir has grown a lot in the last few years. There are two things of note that we have done this year. First, we have tonsured an additional two readers, which allows David some respite. We also decided to make a Christmas CD, which we are almost done recording. We look forward to having it for sale during the holiday season. We are continually striving to learn new music and sing beautifully, to the glory of God. In the coming year we hope to put out a Lamentations CD. New members are always welcome. If you are interested in being a part of this work of the church, please contact me, Lydia Tomasi-Given, Music Director.

Children's Education - Ivana Holiastos

Since the church entrusted me the position of Sunday school teacher I tried my best in working with children. Through different types of activities I tried to enhance, stimulate, foster all five domains of children's development through a church curriculum. Our Sunday school topics dealt with the following: reading lives of saints, painting Easter eggs, learning prayers, gardening, and learning stories from the Bible. Since we have different ages of students in the program, I found it successful that we kept going and were able to establish a routine and rules.

My belief is that there are many things that could be improved, the most valuable being that parents take greater involvement in the program. Ways of doing this are different and I would suggest a parents meeting (twice a year) to discuss these. The biggest challenges lie in enormous differences between the youngest child (2) and the oldest (9). Activities should be properly planned with parent involvement to satisfy the needs of every child. I believe that every child is unique and we as parents, teachers, and community have to become aware of the importance and implementation of living in Christ. We need to help grow this seed from the earliest time.

I would propose as soon as possible for parents to donate material that will stimulate our class. As a Sunday school team we will provide a list of material and other needs to improve the environment of the class space. Some of this may involve monetary donations. I understand that as an advocate for children I will always donate my time, material, and other needs; I hope that the parents and community will also contribute.

Technology Report - David McAtee

Our parish is a very vibrant and active community. The goal of the technology committee this past year has been to make sure our presence on the internet reflects that liveliness. Here are some of the areas we have focused our efforts:

Website: We created a page for the bookstore describing its purpose and offerings and a page containing the latest photo albums with links to Flickr. We created a Paypal account to accept online donations and placed a “Donate” button on the website. On the front page we regularly post news updates, monthly calendars, and events.

Facebook: In the fall of 2009, we created a Joy of All Who Sorrow Facebook page, which now has 123 fans. Everything that is posted on the website is posted simultaneously on Facebook. This exposes us to many people who wouldn't otherwise visit our website.

Flickr/Photos: We have been uploading pictures of our parish life to the Flickr archive, which can be viewed by anyone at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/joyofallwhosorrow/>. The archive contains photos going as far back as 2004, albeit with some “gaps” in time. We also always post the latest photo albums on the website and on Facebook. If anyone has pictures from our past or present they would like to see archived in this manner, please contact me.

Currently, we are exploring solutions for storing certain documents digitally so they can be easily accessed and shared amongst the appropriate people. Other future goals are to extend our outreach with audio podcasts and possibly video, and to create a more comprehensive “Giving” page on the website detailing the needs of the church.

Bookstore Report - Matushka Deborah Tomasi

This past year marked the Archangel Michael Orthodox Bookstore's 10th anniversary. Now in our third and best location, we have finally seen our sales increasing over the past few months and can look to a brighter future.

Our all-volunteer staff now consists of 12 to 14 people who are dedicated to the growth of our mission. Of course, the first purpose of the bookstore is to help people from all walks of life to learn more about Christ and eternal salvation. Specifically, the bookstore offers a place where seekers or the lost may find a way to grow through prayer and spiritual study. Perhaps the most important element to having regular bookstore hours is that the doors of our church are open and people are encouraged to utilize the church for prayer and quiet solitude.

It is no doubt that the bookstore is the most visible outreach of our church, and almost daily new people come through the doors to discover a wealth of books, icons, and sacred music, along with I call our "little jewel" (the chapel). I always take people into the church through the side door so they will experience the full impact of the iconostasis and the living holiness of the saints that bless us with their images and intercession. Most people who see the chapel for the first time are amazed at the beauty and peace that exudes from its walls. If it were not for the many services that Fr. John schedules and for the relics that continue to bring grace to all who enter, that "feeling" would not be as strong as it is.

I am thankful for the many years that bookstore has served to bring grace and healing to inquirers and customers, but we always have a need for more laborers in the field. Hopefully, within the next several months more volunteers will come to the fore, even if it to work one 3-hour shift a month. Every little bit helps. We need people to help clean the bookstore and the facility in general, as well, and to keep the planter box watered. There are countless ways that people can help, so I encourage anyone who has a few extra hours a month to speak with me about this.

The only other item that should be addressed in this report is our need for money to advertise on a regular basis in local newspapers. The more we advertised in the past, the more people would come in. In our heyday (during the first few years of operation), we were grossing over \$30,000 in annual sales, and this primarily was due to smart advertising. It would cost us now about \$250 per month to advertise both the bookstore and the church, but I am convinced that putting our efforts into this level of advertising would quadruple the combined income of the church and bookstore. If anyone would like to add a pledge over-and-above their normal tithe to help further these efforts, please speak with us about it. God will bless us for it.

I would like to thank each of our volunteers for helping this past year. Your time and dedication is invaluable and I thank God every day for your efforts and willingness to serve in such a way.