



YOUR DIOCESE

# Alive in Christ

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ♦ WINTER 2011



Photograph by Don Carey, The Times Leader

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## THE SIMPLE LIFE

When we look around the world we live in, we are often overwhelmed by its complexity and its activity. The world seems never to take a break: businesses, stores and restaurants are open seven days a week, school activities take place at all times, entertainment can be accessed at any hour via the internet and wireless streaming devices and we are often slavishly controlled by all manner of communications: cell phones, emails, text messages and social networking.

All of this worldly activity is supposed to allow us more free time and make our life “easier” and “simpler.” But in reality, it only seems to complicate it by forcing us to devote more money and energy to acquiring those “time-saving” and “life-enhancing” devices and products. Beyond this, all that worldly activity cuts down on the time we spend together as a family, restricts our ability to go to church services and events and chips away at the time that we devote to the care of our soul through prayer, spiritual reading and repentance.

Even those who have the desire for a more balanced and healthy spiritual life find themselves caught in a seemingly endless cycle: feeling weighed down or trapped by the whirlwind of the world and, at the same time, being unable to attain a “simpler” life, a spiritual life free from the cares of the world from the sheer exhaustion wrought by that whirlwind. When the moment for prayer, family activity or even silence comes around, we find ourselves too tired even to relax and half-heartedly pledge to do better “next time.”

And then we check our email one more time...

The experience of the saints throughout the ages knows of this difficult cycle and offers a solution. The solution, however, is not one involving the elimination of the distractions of the world or the artificial construction of a community separate from those distractions. The solution is an ascetical one which finds its path through the effort of overcoming the passions that darken our heart. This ascetical solution is available to us, not through any external force, but through our heart.

One of the great ascetics of the Church, our holy Godbearing Father Anthony the Great, speaks of this through his writings and manifests it through his life. It is often easy to dismiss the great ascetics by saying: “Oh, they could do that because they were saints,” or “I am not as holy as him” or even “those things were possible in those days, but no one does them today.” Certainly the saints exhibited great ascetical efforts and many of them we should not even attempt. But at the same time, it is good to remember not what the saints accomplished, but how they did it and even more, why they did it.

Saint Anthony writes: “Let us endeavor to possess nothing except what we shall take with us to the grave, namely, charity, meekness, righteousness and so on. Virtue, that is, the Kingdom of Heaven, needs only our good will, for it is within us. Actually, it consists simply in keeping the spiritual part of our soul in the purity and beauty in which it has been created.”

Saint Anthony may not have known about cell phones and plasma televisions, but he knew what temptation was and he knew how strong the attraction of the world is. His words are simple words from a pure heart that give us courage to devote ourselves to that most sacred task of keeping our heart and soul pure through the practice of the virtues. Through the virtues, we receive the grace of God which does not eliminate the turmoil of the world, but gives us the strength and the desire to seek after Christ and His peace.



## DIOCESAN NEWS

Once again, the Diocese was blessed to receive the visitation of the miracle working Iveron Icon of the Mother of God of Hawaii. Earlier this year, St. Tikhon's Monastery joyfully received the myrrh-streaming icon from Hawaii for the annual pilgrimage. The icon, which is a printed copy of the Montreal Myrrh-streaming Icon of the Theotokos, began to miraculously stream myrrh while in the care of Reader Nectary and his wife in their home in October 2007. The couple are parishioners of the Holy Theotokos of Iveron Church of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. Since then, the icon has continued to stream myrrh and work miracles. The icon visited a few parishes within our diocese including Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Wilkes-Barre (pictured right holding the icon, Fr. Joseph Martin), Christ the Saviour in Harrisburg, and St. Nicholas Church in Olyphant. Many of the faithful flocked to venerate the holy icon of the Mother of God; over 400 laity and clergy from throughout South Central Pennsylvania were present at Christ the Saviour. The full account and more photographs of the icon can be viewed on the church's website: [www.orthodoxhawaii.org](http://www.orthodoxhawaii.org).

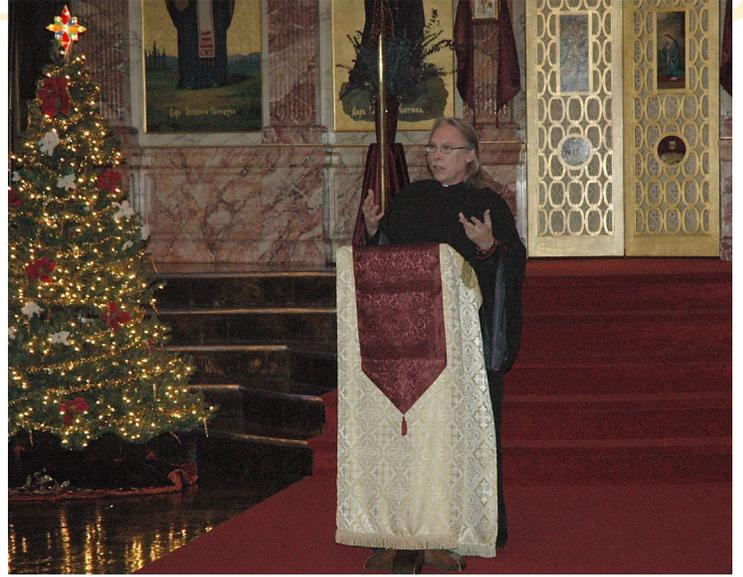


Photograph by Don Carey, The Times Leader





October 24 - His Grace made a pastoral visit to St. Mary's Church in Coaldale where he concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with church rector, Fr. Daniel Mathewson, and Fr. Daniel Ressetar. Following the Liturgy, there was a dinner in the church hall where the youth gave a special presentation on the Fall and Resurrection. The Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) had their 80th Annual Central Pennsylvania District Convention, led by District Governor, Gary Lelo.



December 4 - His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, spoke at a retreat held at St. Nicholas Church in Philadelphia. The other speakers were church rector, Fr. John Bohush, and Protodeacon Joseph Edwards. Afterwards, Vespers was served. The following day, His Grace concelebrated the Divine Liturgy. Several St. Nicholas Awards were given to parishioners.



November 7 - Fr. John Behr, Dean of St. Vladimir Orthodox Seminary, visited St. Michael Church in Jermyn on the occasion of its Feast Day and 101st Anniversary. His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with Fr. John Kowalczyk, church rector, Fr. Eugene Pianovich, and Fr. John Behr. A banquet was served after the service.



The annual Diocesan Assembly was held at St. Nicholas Church in Bethlehem on Friday evening, Nov. 19, until Saturday, Nov. 20. A summary of the assembly is available on the diocesan website.



November 21 - His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, attended the Slavonic *Obednitsa* at St. Stephen Cathedral in Philadelphia. He then concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with rector, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuck, Fr. Nicholai Gulin, and Fr. Deacon George Zlatkowski. His Grace introduced Fr. Nicholai who will be assisting with Slavonic services at the Cathedral.



November 29 - His Grace participated in a roundtable discussion at Kutztown University. The topic was concerning the role of religion in American politics and public institutions.



December 19 - His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, made a pastoral visit to Holy Trinity Church in Stroudsburg. He concelebrated a full Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with church rector, Fr. Nicholas Solak. Several of the altar boys from the parish received training to serve as subdeacons for the service.





On Sunday evening, December 19, a group of 15 pilgrims from St. Catherine's Church in Moscow, the OCA representation church in Russia, led by Fr. Zachaeus, visited His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, at the Diocesan Center in South Canaan. The Diocesan Center and St. Tikhon's Monastery was just one stop on their tour of various centers of Orthodox Christianity in America. Other areas they visited were St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, D.C., Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, Jordanville, and Black Lick, PA, where they attended the memorial service for the Ever-Memorable Archbishop Job (Osacky) on the first year anniversary of his falling asleep in the Lord. Many more photos can be viewed on the St. Catherine's Church website: [www.st-catherine.ru](http://www.st-catherine.ru)





Photos taken by the Eastern Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.



# KURSK ROOT ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

On Monday morning, December 27, the Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God arrived in Philadelphia and visited St. Stephen's Cathedral on the occasion of the patronal feast day. The Icon was greeted by the clergy, led by His Grace Bishop Tikhon.

His Grace celebrated the Divine Liturgy, co-served by Eastern American Diocesan secretary Archpriest Serge Lukianov, cathedral dean Priest Victor Gorodenchuk, and visiting clergy. Adverse weather conditions made it difficult for many parishioners and clergy to be at the service. Upon completion of the Liturgy, a short moleben was served before the wonderworking icon.

In honor of the Kursk Icon's visit to Philadelphia, Fr. Serge presented Bishop Tikhon and Fr. Victor with a copy of the Kursk Root Icon with a commemorative plaque from the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, His Eminence, Metropolitan Hilarion. Bishop Tikhon expressed his joy at having been able to serve the Divine Liturgy that day before the wonderworking Kursk Root Icon, and asked that Fr. Serge pass along his gratitude to Metropolitan Hilarion for his kindness and brotherly love toward the hierarchy, clergy, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America. More photographs can be viewed on the ROCOR website as well as the visitation schedule of the Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God (<http://eadiocese.org/en.index.htm>).

Right: Fr. Serge Lukianov,  
Secretary of the ROCOR  
Eastern American Diocese

Below: Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk  
greeting Fr. Serge. Bishop Tikhon  
venerates the Icon.

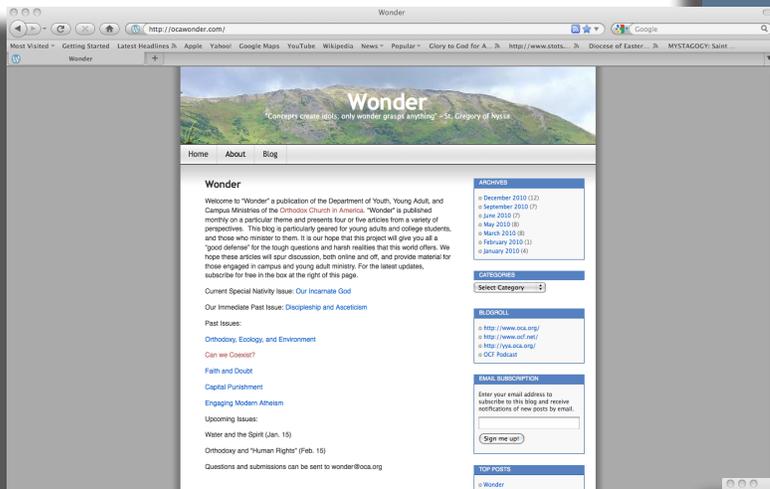


## ORTHODOXYOUTH.ORG



The Office of Young Adult Activities recently launched a website dedicated to the annual summer camp at St. Tikhon's Monastery. Information is available for parents, campers, and counselors.

## OCAWONDER.COM



The Society for Orthodox Christian History in the Americas (SOCHA) exists to promote the study of the history of the Orthodox Christian Church in the New World; to collect source materials and make them available to researchers and scholars; to disseminate historical information to the public; and to encourage networking among those engaged in the study of American Orthodox history.

## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

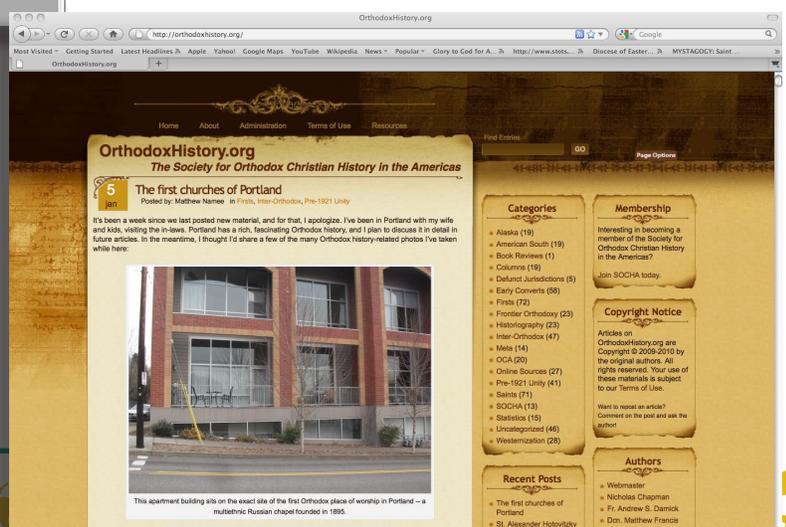
Orthodox Christian Bible Studies provides free multimedia resources that are formed—and informed—by the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church. With the Bible studies you can plunge into a book of the New Testament, looking at the biblical text and its historical background, and learning how the biblical truths you learn can transform your life.

## STTIKHONSCAMP.ORG



Wonder is a publication of the Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries of the Orthodox Church in America. The blog is published monthly on a particular theme and presents four or five articles from a variety of perspectives. Wonder is particularly geared for young adults and college students, and those who minister to them.

## ORTHODOXHISTORY.ORG



The title of this post is quite misleading – for in proper theological language, there are no “personal issues.” Our culture is quite fond of issues – both the politico-entertainment industry – and many individuals. It is a word and a phenomenon that has been baptized by the culture such that “being concerned with the issues” makes someone sound as if things matter to them in a significant way. The Orthodox response to the issues should generally be – not to respond.

The true “issue” of our time and of all times is the salvation of our souls. And, it is important to note, this is not a “legal” or “forensic” issue, but a matter of the deep healing of the spiritual disease that infects us, and, through us, all the world around us. We do not see things as they are (we are spiritually blind); we do not think as we ought (we are spiritually ignorant); we do not feel about things in a proper way (we are spiritually disordered in our emotions). Coming to grips with the passions and their disordered state (which affects our mind, emotions and our body) is very difficult work. It requires insight and honesty and a deep commitment to the Truth of Christ, through Whom we may alone find healing and salvation.

In the meantime it is possible to avoid all this by concerning ourselves with issues. Some concern themselves with political issues, particularly if those issues carry a moral component. But it is as possible to take the “right” position on a political issue as a wretched sinner as it is to take the “right” position on a political issue as a saint – though saints often have a

strange way of not being involved in “political issues.”

Others set their sights in other places and concern themselves with theological issues or local issues such as the goings-on in a parish.

I would offer a brief definition of “issue” as I am using it here: any subject or situation with which we may concern ourselves, that having been addressed, leaves ourselves and others involved no closer to our salvation than when we began (and perhaps farther away).

The transformation of the world will not come about through the successive addressing of issues. It

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## Personal Issues

From the Weblog

“Glory to God for All Things”

*Fr. Stephen Freeman*

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will, according to the Fathers of the Church, come about through the transformation of human persons, whom, having been restored to the proper image and likeness of Christ, are able to restore others and creation around them. It is thus that the “movers and shakers” of our world may never be acknowledged by the world itself.

It is significant that the world admires Christ as a moral teacher – for He was not a moral teacher. Christ, the God-Man, was and is the Mediator between God and man, the means by which our distorted selves may be restored and transfigured and all creation set

free. That transformation is simply impossible through “moral” effort.

Classical monastic spiritual teaching would speak instead about the purification of the passions and the illumination and deification of man. More recent Orthodox writers and teachers, such as St. Silouan and the Elder Sophrony, have addressed the same teaching in terms of personhood. However, in both cases the nature of our salvation is described in the most profound terms of the inner life.

Orthodoxy is a seamless garment. The sacramental life and the ascetical life are not two separate compartments. Both have to do with the healing of the soul. It is for such a reason that communion in the Orthodox Church is always linked with fasting and confession, however the discipline is applied. Communion is the “medicine of immortality” in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch. But that same medicine must be received by a heart that has prepared itself through fasting and repentance. As Christ Himself proclaimed, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” So too, we approach the Kingdom in the Cup of Christ, and our hearts must greet it with repentance.

Our issues are not intellectual or political – but existential. Our brokenness is at the very level of our existence.

Some years ago I heard the abbot of a monastery describe the young people who came for retreats during the 60’s and early 70’s. “They were so angry about peace,” he said. He added this thought: “The

## PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

contemplative need go no further than his own heart than to find the source of all violence in the world.”

This, indeed, is the issue.

Dostoevsky, the great 19th century Russian writer, spent his early adulthood deeply involved in a group of semi-revolutionary writers, artists and intellectuals. As a group, they were deeply committed and involved in the issues of the world. The reform of the Russian state – and in some corners – the reform of the Russian Church was an all-consuming passion. The Romanticism of the 19th century – its belief in the perfectibility of man, if only the proper state and economic system were employed – yielded the various experiments of the 20th century – with generally disastrous results.

Dostoevsky’s own existential crisis occurred when he and a small group of similar conspirators were arrested for sedition and sentenced to death. At the last moment their sentences were commuted to short terms in the Tsar’s Siberian prison system. It was in the few minutes that preceded his commutation – during which the great writer had opportunity to ponder death and his short life – that an inner change occurred. It is not that he saw everything in a flash – but rather that the issues moved away from an intellectual stage and into the deepest parts of his heart.

In what are perhaps his two greatest novels – the heart of man is revealed in the crime of murder. In *Crime and Punishment* a young man,

Raskolnikov, convinces himself that only the will to power matters, and that he should be able to rob and kill a wretched old woman because he would put her money to better use. He succeeds in killing her only to discover that his “philosophy” is bankrupt. Utility (what works) is insufficient for the human soul. He finds salvation in prison through the unrelenting love of God.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, murder again is at the center of man’s “issues.” Again it becomes the catalyst for a crisis in which the truth of God is revealed. The moral reform of the characters of the novel is a non-issue. Indeed, the most “moral” of the Karamazov brothers is arguably the unbeliever, Ivan. But Ivan, interestingly, is the devil. It takes little character to argue about justice and to be concerned with fairness. In my experience, even unredeemed humanity is born with an instinct for such arguments.

Most of us do not see ourselves as murderers and are thus content with lesser “issues,” none of which will push us to the point of repentance. I often think that Jesus asked those who sought to follow Him to give everything to the poor precisely to bring them to the point of crisis. To give away everything in the name of Christ raises the question about the name and nature of Christ to its proper place. Either He is worthy of such an action or He is not worthy of any action. The Kingdom of God is never found in half-measures, or in carefully measured actions of any sort. Anxiety and care cannot map the road into the Kingdom.

I am not suggesting that we cease to care about people or the things that effect them. I am suggesting that our concern for “issues” falls far short of actually caring about people and the things that effect them. It is possible to love humanity and actually hate people. I have seen it far too often and have done it myself.

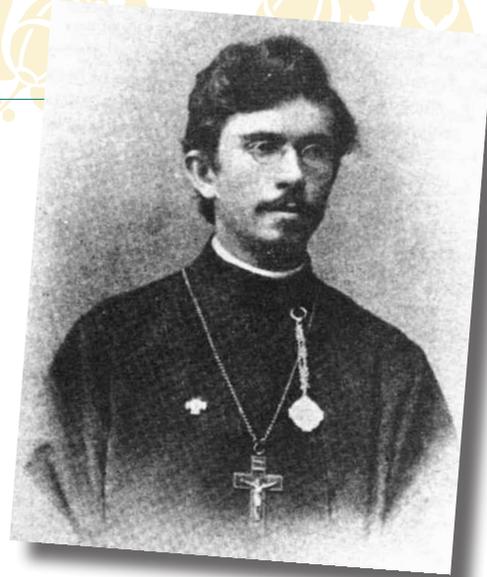
It is much easier to trust someone who wants to “save the world,” if they have also bothered first to “save themselves” (yet another paradoxical statement). It shouldn’t take an arrest by the Tsar to bring us to our senses – though for Dostoevsky it seems to have helped. Perhaps it would be sufficient if we would recognize that we ourselves are murderers and that no amount of moral reform will return the life we have taken. Nothing short of resurrection will present us with the medicine for which our souls thirst.

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*Fr. Stephen Freeman is the priest at St. Anne Orthodox Church (OCA) in Oak Ridge, TN. He is the author of the weblog “Glory to God for all Things” (<http://fatherstephen.wordpress.com/>) and also has a podcast on Ancient Faith Radio titled “Glory to God: Thoughts and Reflections on Orthodox Theology and Life.”*

## St. Alexander Hotovistky on the New Year

*Obtained from  
Orthodoxhistory.org*



**A**gain I stand on the threshold of a New Year. Again I stand on the crest of a mountain, where I may make a halt and review, before I walk again on the path I have trod. I shall halt, I shall rest, I shall hush my troubled heart, be it only for this short moment, I shall hide from the blizzard, which had followed me ever since I set out, and will meet me again the moment I leave my seclusion. Oh, Lord! help me calmly examine my soul and Thy creation.

I gaze at God's creation, at everything which He had sent to me, which has been placed close to me, which, through His will, has come together in my life, and, with my hand on my heart, from the depth of my heart and conscience, I say: all this is very good! Yonder is my happy childhood — how brightly it shines, diffusing its aroma from the distant long ago, how it lights up my path before me, how it freshens my soul, during spells of exhaustion! Yonder is my ardent youth and with it all that brought to my soul the first raptures of feeling. Here are my lessons, my joys, my bitter losses, here are the people to like with whom is my happiness, here are others, whom

I have buried in the damp earth, almost unconscious with grief; here are all in whose company I grew up, with whom I worried, from whom I have received gifts of love and of wrath, from whom have I accepted honour and dishonour; here is Nature, which, at times, appeared to me more alive and more responsive, which had more power to energize my spirit, than living beings themselves; here are my pleasures, my connections, my illnesses. All, all this is very good. All was good, that God's Providence sent into my life. Nothing was in vain. Everything was for good.

My past! How far it stretches back in the wondrous country, whence come to me a glad sound, or a beloved image, consolation, and hope, and bitter remorse. I gaze at it and I smile for joy, I gaze at it and I cover my face with my hands for shame. Yet I know: it is mine, it is myself, it is a part of my life, and no power can take it from me or erase what is written in it. And that which is written in it is the future, it is the fate of man. Many are the lives in it, whose mysterious meaning will be disclosed at some future time, at the time when the seed that was sown,

will come to ripeness, when, in letters of fire, it will bring forward the word, traced on it by eternal wisdom, unrevealed as yet to mind and conscience, but not to be separated from life. Whilst man lived his days, whilst he worked and slept, whilst he laughed and cried, whilst he moved and rested — eternal Wisdom traced this word on his life and sealed it with a seal of its own, putting a magic spell on it, until the time comes for the seal to be broken, and for a dark corner of a man's life to be lit up by the light of God's understanding, which lies hidden in life. It is an agony to read some of these words, but once you have read them, your heart will know, that those are words of God's love, of God's solicitude for man. And with every new word, a mystery is revealed, a veil is drawn away and man is made able to understand the thoughts and longings of his own heart.

All is very good. Yet, even now, my restless heart is throbbing with unknown longing and straining to see into the distant future.

Oh Lord! let Thy blessing rest on us.

# PARISH & FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

## *Christ the Saviour, Harrisburg*



November 22 - parish clergy distributed the canned/dried goods, and turkeys so generously donated by the faithful of Christ the Saviour parish, to their neighbors in need. In addition to the food items collected, they also distributed over \$420 in grocery store gift cards that were submitted to the parish office.



January 1 - Phoebe Firestine was Baptized and Chrismated. Pictured (l-r): Fr. Stephen Vernak, Mark Yerke, Christina Yerke holding Phoebe, Evelyn Firestine, Jennifer Firestine, Grace Firestine, Sean Firestine, and Gabrielle Yerke.

## *Holy Annunciation, Berwick*



December 4 - The choir from Holy Annunciation Church in Berwick performed at the Tree Fest held in Bloomsburg. This year, 150 decorated Christmas trees were donated to needy families. Pictured here (left to right): Alyssa Macri, Father Michael Demko, Diane Macri, Lisa Popko, Josh Hottenstein with Naomi and Luke, Roy Peckham, David Kessler, Director, John Buckeye, Kathryn Kessler, Ann Marie Peckham, and Yvette Skrip.

## *Holy Apostles, Mechanicsburg*



Due to the excellent stewardship of the faithful, annual Fall Dinner Dances, and several generous donations from outside the parish, the mortgage on the present facility was paid off a year early.

## Holy Trinity, Wilkes-Barre



The children of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church participated in two outreach projects during the Christmas Fast season. The teens conducted a bake sale on the Sunday prior to the Nativity fast to raise money to support the work of OCMC missionary Christina Semon. They raised \$300 to send to Christina to assist with her work with mothers and children in Romania. In addition, the church school reached out to those in our local community, collecting food items throughout the fast for the local food bank in Wilkes-Barre.

## St. Nicholas, Bethlehem



November 11 - St. Nicholas in Bethlehem completed their mortgage payments for the construction of the church hall, thanks to the efforts of the faithful.

## St. Michael, Jermyrn



October 10 -St. Michael's Church celebrated Fr. John Kowalczyk's 25th anniversary as rector. A banquet was held in Father and Matushka's honor for their faithful service to the parishioners of St. Michael's.

*When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.*

*Unknown Orthodox Monk, 1100 AD*

## St. Stephen, Philadelphia



On Nov. 9, Natalie Hatrak, of St. Stephen's Cathedral, was awarded the Chapter Level Volunteer of the Year award by Fred Graziano, Chairman of the Special Olympics New Jersey Board of Directors. Natalie has dedicated her time and talents to numerous events of the Special Olympics for the past four years.



Continue to support the opening of Agia Sophia!  
[www.agiasophiaharrisburg.com](http://www.agiasophiaharrisburg.com)

View the 2009 Annual Report and 2010 Quick Facts at [www.doepa.org](http://www.doepa.org)

## BISHOP TIKHON'S SCHEDULE

February 4-6  
Teen Winter Retreat

February 10  
Diocesan Council Meeting

February 21-25  
Holy Synod Retreat in Santa Fe, NM

March 6  
Forgiveness Sunday  
(Location TBA)

March 13  
Sunday of Orthodoxy  
St. Stephen Cathedral, Philadelphia

March 15-17  
Holy Synod Spring session

## UPCOMING EVENTS

May 30  
Memorial Day Pilgrimage

June 18  
100th Anniversary of St. John the Baptist Church,  
Edwardsville

September 17  
Reconsecration of All Saints Church, Olyphant

October 29  
100th Anniversary of St. John the Baptist Church,  
Nanticoke

October 31  
All American Council  
Seattle, WA

Visit [www.doepa.org](http://www.doepa.org) for more information!