

Metropolitan Council meets

2005 OCA Operating Budget adopted

The Fall Session of the Metropolitan Council of the Orthodox Church in America met in the Chancery, at Syosset, New York on November 11, 2004. Archpriest Michael Westerberg, Diocesan Clergy Representative and George Ludko, Diocesan Lay Representative were in attendance.

Metropolitan's Address

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, reported on a variety of issues. His Beatitude reviewed his travels this past year. He emphasized the importance of maintaining strong ties with other Orthodox churches throughout the world. Our church benefits greatly by keeping strong and consistent contact with other Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches throughout the world. His Beatitude also spoke of the need to increase voluntary giving, especially through the Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards (FOS).

Report of the Chancellor

Protopresbyter Robert Kondratich reported on Episcopal matters:

- The visits His Beatitude made this past year.
- Statute revisions.
- SCOBA.
- Our relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.
- The work of the various church departments.
- The generous work and gift of LCBA insurance company which has agreed to offer term life insurance to all seminarians and their

dependents during their education years at one of our seminaries.

External Affairs Report

It was reported that David Wagschal will be leaving his position in this department to attend graduate school. It was noted that the work of Fr. Kishkovsky and Mr. Wagschal has been extremely beneficial to us as we continue to make our place known within the communication of Orthodox Churches throughout the world.

Another important part of this department deals with the contacts and communications that are established with not only the U.S. State Department, but also the government authorities of the other countries as we visit their lands and when they also visit the United States.

Report of the Treasurer

Archpriest Dimitri Oselinsky presented the Treasurer's Report. After discussion, the Metropolitan Council accepted the 2005 Budget of the Orthodox Church in America. The budget does include a 2.7% salary increase for the Episcopate and Chancery Staff Members. There was no increase given in 2004. The balanced budget totals \$4,403,858.00.

Fellowship of Orthodox Stewards - FOS

Fr. Joseph Fester will be leaving as Executive Director of FOS as of December 31, 2004. The position has been listed and we are hopeful a qualified candidate will start early in 2005.

14th All American Council

A report was given by Fr. Myron Manzuk and Alice Woog on the 14th AAC. *Our Church and the Future* is the theme. This will be supported by goals that will allow for the 14th ACC Activities to be met with Worship Services, Pre-Council Papers, Plenary Sessions, Lunch Discussions, Forums, Workshops, and Youth Activities. All people attending are encouraged to use a passport as a means of identification to Canada. Do not rely on birth certificates, photo id's etc. Passports should be used by all attendees.



COUNCIL TO 7



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His Grace, Bishop NIKON, Administrator
The Very Reverend John J. Dresko, Editor

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ON THE DOCKET

A listing of upcoming events in the Diocese.
Please forward any dates you wish to be included to the Editor.

February 2, 2005

Diocesan Council Meeting, 6:30 P.M.
Holy Trinity Church, New Britain, CT

February 3, 2005

Connecticut Deanery Meeting, 7:00 P.M.
Ss. Cyril & Methodius Church, Terryville, CT

February 25-26, 2005

Pre-Lenten Retreat
St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Church, Clinton, CT

March 14, 2005

GREAT LENT BEGINS

March 20, 2005

Connecticut Deanery Orthodoxy Vespers, 4:00 P.M.
Holy Trinity Church, New Britain, CT

March 27, 2005

Connecticut Deanery Mission Vespers, 4:00 P.M.
St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Church, Clinton, CT

April 3, 2005

FORCC Mission Vespers, 4:00 P.M.
TBA

April 10, 2005

Connecticut Deanery Mission Vespers, 4:00 P.M.
Nativity of the Holy Virgin Church, Waterbury, CT

April 17, 2005

Connecticut Deanery Holy Unction, 4:00 P.M.
Three Saints Church, Ansonia, CT

April 18, 2005

Metropolitan Council Meeting
OCA Chancery, Syosset, NY

April 24, 2005

PALM SUNDAY
Connecticut Deanery Bridegroom Matins, 4:00 P.M.
Ss. Cyril & Methodius Church, Terryville, CT

May 1, 2005

THE HOLY PASCHA

June 4, 2005

Consecration of New Church
Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, CT

July 17-22, 2005

14th ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL, Toronto

Around the Parishes

Ansonia, Connecticut

The Holiday season here in Ansonia went by quickly. We had our First "Breakfast with Santa" for the children of our parish which went well and the children had a lot of fun with their visitor. There were mini pancakes and juice for each child, a small gift and chocolate money passed out by Fr. Nicholas Timpko, and each child had their picture taken on Santa's lap. Hopefully, this was the first of many more to come as it gave the children a chance at fellowship.

Our Senior Group was busy during the season and made donations to various organizations, such as Area Congregations Together which supports our local food pantry and the Florida Relief Fund. Our Seniors keep on going and manage to assist in many ways-what a great asset to our church!

New this year, Fr. Timpko is holding an Adult Bible Study Group for the first time in the evenings. There were quite a few adults that showed an interest in this, but were unable to attend the already scheduled daytime meetings because of work obligations. The group meets every

OUR DIOCESE

PEOPLE
PLACES
EVENTS

Wednesday evening (for now) and you do not need to attend all, so if you've missed some, you're welcome to come along at any point.

Our annual meeting was held in January and council members were re-elected as well as new ones – individual names to be published next month.

– submitted by Julie Craft

Bridgeport, Connecticut

On the feast of the Nativity of Christ, Mr. Yuri Blyke joined the Holy Ghost community. Mr. Blyke was born in Odessa, USSR. His parents emigrated to the United States in 1978. His father was a non-believer, but his mother was an Orthodox Christian. Yuri wanted to be baptized at the age of 25 and was baptized in the Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, an OCA church in Brooklyn. However, he did not start his regular church life, since he did not receive any instruction in the faith. But he continued his spiritual search, reading the books about Oriental religions and practicing Buddhist meditation. Yet, this practice always left him with a feeling of incompleteness, making him search for something else. The search for true spirituality became very intensive after the



Fr. Vadim Pismenny and Yuri Blyke, in Bridgeport, CT

birth of Yuri's daughter, Julia, in May of 2004.

He started to visit different Orthodox churches and came to the Holy Ghost Church in September, 2004. Since then he attended every Sunday liturgy as well as an adult education class organized by Fr. Vadim Pismenny for immigrants from the former USSR. After three months of intensive catechesis, Yuri went for his first confession and received Holy Communion the next day. Following Divine Liturgy, Mr. Blyke invited Fr. Vadim and members of adult ed group to his home in Norwalk, to celebrate this wonderful event together with his wife, Victoria, and 7 month-old daughter, Julia. The parishioners of Holy Ghost welcome Mr. Blyke to their community.

– submitted by Fr. Vadim Pismenny

Hartford, Connecticut

Our All Saints Church School high school students teamed up under the guidance of Nick Medynski, one of our teachers, to prepare and serve a spaghetti dinner to benefit the OCA Christmas Stocking Project, for which they raised \$500. The food and goal were both delicious.

Another "food event" is our New Year's Eve covered dish supper offered after services for the Feast Day January 1st, coordinated by the Andrzejewski family. It is a good time for persons to come together for food and fellowship as they get ready to greet the new year.

Our Christmas tree memorial ribbon project, under the direction of Joan Holobinko, continues to grow in popularity. Persons submit a \$5.00 donation as an offering for the health or memory of a loved one – the names are then written on gold ribbons and placed on a lit tree inside our Church edifice. After the Nativity, the ribbons are distributed to the donors who can then use them on

The Stremsky Family Story

In November 2004, our parish, Holy Transfiguration Church of New Haven, CT, along with other parishes on the East Coast, was blessed with the visit of Archpriest Nikolai Stremsky, his wife Matushka Galina, and twelve of their children.

Officially known as the parents of the largest family in Russia, over the past twelve years they have adopted fifty-four children. In addition, their small town of Saraktash has been transformed into a true center of the Orthodox faith of that region. This trip was their sixth visit to America to raise funds for the needs of the family and the Orthodox community of Saraktash.

Ever grateful for our support and generosity, and having nothing material to give in return, this family humbly offers us their musical talents, the joy and smiles of their children, and an inspiring example of lives fully dedicated to Christ. In each parish visited, the children gave a concert of Orthodox hymns, folk and popular songs, and dances.

Newly ordained Priest Nikolai received his assignment in April 1990 from the Metropolitan and, together with his wife, arrived in Saraktash, a small town in Southern Russia. The public Orthodox life in the town had barely resumed after decades of godless Soviet power during which time their Church of St. Simeon was vandalized and closed. It was only a year before Father Nikolai's arrival that the Orthodox community of Saraktash had been re-established. A small prayer home, built in the late 1940s, was now the community's only possession.

With Father's arrival, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in Saraktash for the first time in thirty years. The revival of the Orthodox life in the town was marked by the miraculous renewal of an icon of the Mother of God kept at the prayer home. Over the years this icon had almost completely blackened. At the time of the reopening of the prayer home,

little by little, the icon cleared, revealing the original holy images.

The same year the Church of St Simeon's building was officially returned to the faithful a Sunday church school opened its doors for children. The restoration of the Church of St Simeon was completed in 1992 and that same year the church was re-consecrated and reopened to the faithful.

Amidst all the rebuilding and revitalization of Saraktash, an event occurred which would lead to the growth of the community in a unique way. In 1991, an old, sick woman who was thrown out of the house and into the street by her own daughter came to Father Nikolai seeking care and shelter. Initially, she was housed in the church's small inn and the parishioners took turns attending to her.

But soon more elderly people started arriving, each with their own sad story. Their numbers grew and in order to continue to provide proper care for them it was determined a staff was required. This small inn was full, yet none of its inhabitants wanted to go live in the state-owned nursing home. "It meant there was God's blessing; hence a need to expand," remembers Father Nikolai. Mercy House for the elderly, named for Saints Nicholas and Panteleimon, was built over a period of two years and consecrated in 1993.

One day in 1992, God's providence brought an elderly woman with her two small grandchildren to the Stremsky's home. She said that she was too old to care for them; they had no father and their mother had been killed. Father and Matushka accepted God's gift of parenthood and these two children became the first children adopted.

Later that year, while visiting an orphanage in order to baptize children, Father Nikolai was followed around by small children who kept asking, "Are you my Dad? Take me with you!" That same year, fifteen

children, ranging in age from 1 to 7 years, found their new family and parents in the Stremsky home.

Father Nikolai remembers: "In children there is no anger, no opposition to God, for the human soul in its nature is Christian. And from the beginning all the virtues are already in us. One only has to let this develop, and not to let sin seize the child's soul. Matushka Galina and I had long wanted to have a big, close family. Visiting the neighboring villages, as well as the homes in Saraktash, I saw how difficult people's lives were. In some families, children were left on their own to care for themselves and from a very early age only saw drunkenness, fighting, swearing. Nothing positive. As a priest, I could not remain indifferent. For if we do not bring up our children in the Orthodox faith, ten years from now the churches will be empty. There will be nobody to go there. And a church without souls, without people, is just walls."

So the life of this new family was born. Father and Matushka went on adopting children deprived of parents' love and care. Boys and girls of various nationalities and ages, each with their own sorrowful story, found security, love, and faith within the Stremsky household. The house became filled with children's voices and laughter.

But the tremendous joy of the new life for these children did not come without its sorrows for the parents. Father's and Matushka's life was very difficult at first, since the children who had seen nothing but evil, had numerous problems. Many were from alcoholic homes, abusive homes, living on the streets, or abandoned in hospitals after delivery. The children had been neglected and malnourished. Some were lacking in moral values and demonstrated criminal behaviors. Father Nikolai acknowledges that the hardest thing to face was the ill habits the children brought from their previous lives. It is by God's grace

that Father and Matushka were able to overcome these struggles.

Having saved their children from the streets, neglect and unknown futures, Father Nikolai and Matushka Galina knew that the only way to ensure that their children would grow as Orthodox Christians, without fear that they would return to their former ways of life, was to raise them in a protected Orthodox environment. This meant a safe home and a safe school, free from the negative influences of the secular world. A larger family residence was constructed at the site of Mercy House between 1995 and 1998 together with St. Nicholas Church. Also, in 1996, the Orthodox school was established near their home opening its doors to both the Stremsky children and the surrounding community. The school provides complete pre-college education as well as Orthodox disciplines.

Little by little, Saraktash became known all over Russia for its complex of churches and Orthodox institutions, more simply referred to as the Holy Trinity *Obitel* (which is Russian for “habitation,” “peaceful place”). Mercy House for the elderly and the Orthodox school were joined by the three year Diocesan Theological School, which prepares young men for entering seminaries and trains men and women as choir directors.

The rapid growth of *Obitel* necessitated the building of a larger church. The original, small church was disassembled and on that same site, the construction of the larger Holy Trinity Cathedral was started in 2001. Designed to represent a copy of the main cathedral of Orenburg demolished in the 1930s, the cathedral consists of two churches. St. Simeon Church, which is the lower level church, has already been completed and is used for services.

The monastic community and the Orthodox sisterhood founded at *Obitel* a few years ago crown it as a place of labor for God and salvation. In 1999, several of the women of Mercy House were tonsured to the monastic ranks. The

monastic community has expanded since. The Orthodox sisterhood is a non-monastic order modeled after that of the St. Martha and Maria *Obitel* in Moscow, founded by the great martyr Grand-Duchess Elizabeth. The sisterhood takes care of the elderly of the Mercy House and the little ones of the Stremsky family. Some of the older Stremsky daughters are among the sisters.

The family now has fifty-five children. In 2002, having already adopted fifty-two children, Matushka Galina gave birth to a daughter. The “first generation” of the Stremsky children are now approaching their twenties, and are already working, as well as helping their parents care for the little ones. In 2001, the family greeted its first high school graduates and in 2004, the first wedding in the family was celebrated. Father Nikolai has no special preference concerning the careers his children will choose, for one thing should remain with them: “I want them first of all to be Orthodox Christians,” he says.

During the family’s two most recent trips to America, we had an opportunity to spend some informal time with them. The children, and the climate, and the relations in the family combine completely ordinary and rarely seen traits. We saw typical boys and girls. But on all there clearly lies a “seal” of a pious and disciplined Orthodox family, where everything is done only with “papa’s” blessing and the authority of parents is indisputable.

Mischievous at other times, the children will without regret leave whatever they are doing in order to carry out their duties. The same young girls, who will giggle when performing the concert, will cook the dinner for the family and clean the kitchen afterwards. The constant presence of prayer is clear in this household. His Holiness, Patriarch Alexey, who knows the family personally, once said: “These children have pure souls; I saw them pray”.

As we also learned, at home in Saraktash, the safe environment and discipline in the family are reinforced by certain restrictions. The children

have no access to the internet outside supervised computer lessons at school; they are not allowed to watch violent movies; and, although they are allowed to go into town on weekends, their father keeps an eye on who they meet outside *Obitel*.

A firm believer that the only way of bringing up children is with kindness (especially given how much evil some of them already saw), Fr. Nikolai has nevertheless his efficient ways of penalizing those who misbehave or neglect their studies. For example, such “transgressors” will not be allowed to go on the family trips and excursions. Yet this same Father Nikolai is also their “papa” who will make sure that his little girls’ coats are properly zipped before going outside and will walk hand in hand with them at the zoo.

Having no official sponsors or benefactors to rely on, Father Nikolai had to take a loan for the trip to America. They seek little in the way of comforts. For the majority of their visit to America they stayed in a Russian cultural center in New York where the girls simply slept on the floor of a stage and the boys on the floor by the last row of seats. They travel the way they live: simply, humbly and without complaint. The money raised will be put towards the family’s living expenses, the building of the cathedral, and other needs of the *Obitel*. Very quickly all will be gone. But Father Nikolai will not be dismayed: never has the Lord promised an easy life for those who strive to walk in His ways. The net will be full of fish, but not without the fishermen casting their nets.

By the grace of our Lord, it became possible for a poor priest and his wife to raise fifty-five children in faith and with love, and to create this extraordinary center of Orthodox life amidst the poverty and tough realities of post-communist Russia. This is a wonderful fulfillment of the promise of our Savior Who said that if we seek the Kingdom of God first, the rest of our needs will be met.

– submitted by Dmitry Klimenko
and Susan Lickwar

PARISHES FROM 3

their own Christmas trees in the years to come – another link between the home and Church. Happy New Year!

– submitted by Fr. William DuBovik

New Britain, Connecticut

We were happy to welcome Greg and Barbara Cwiekala and their newborn daughter, Maya Elizabeth, to our parish. They recently moved to the area from New York, where both had emigrated from Poland. Maya Elizabeth was baptized on December 12th.

We also recently welcomed Mark and Ann Myszka and their children, Andrew, Francis, and Maggie to our parish. Ann grew up in the Orthodox faith and she and her family are returning to the Church. We hope to chrismate the children during the Great Lenten season. We are so happy to welcome both families to the Holy Trinity family.

Our joy was tempered with sadness, however, as we had to say farewell to Dan and Jeanne McGuire, and their children, Danny and Melissa, who relocated to Massachusetts for a new job. They will be deeply missed in our parish community. May God bless them and all their future endeavors!

New Haven, Connecticut

'Twas the month of December and all through the Church, the parishioner's fingers were busy at work. Our bakers (Father Michael, Lydia Bolash, Luba Dowling, Patricia and Peter Karlak) arrived bright and early one cold Friday morning, to make the prosfora.

The Sunday school children and teachers sang carols and decorated the Christmas tree during the Nativity prefeast. Many of the ornaments were hand made by the children. Following this activity, the children attended a Christmas craft and cookie workshop, hosted by Martha Asarisi and Alexis Swan. The "R" Club donated materials. The Ladies Auxiliary held their annual Christmas bake sale, which was a huge success.

We ask God's blessings on our very generous Altar Guild and Ladies Auxiliary. The Altar Guild donated coffee, tea, rolls and bagels for the coffee hour, their Christmas gift to the parishioners. The Ladies Auxiliary coordinated a visitation to our parish from Saint Nicholas, who left bags of goodies for the youth. All through the year, these very dedicated parishioners give of their time and energy to support our parish. Thank you.

We needed sunglasses to offset the glow from proud parents and grandparents. Richard and Martha Asarisi's daughter, Natalie, was named Student of the Month at the Helen Street School, Hamden District. Roman Fillyaw, son of John and Natasha Fillyaw and Victor Korman, grandson of Elya and Larissa Korman were Altar Servers for the first time. Congratulations to all. Many Years!

We welcomed the Mosher Family, Deacon Joshua,

Blessing of Long Island Sound

Fr. Steven Voytovich and the faithful of St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Parish in Clinton, CT, gathered at the shores of Long Island Sound on Sunday, January 9, 2005, to serve the Great Blessing of Water.



Matushka Jenny and children Elias, Ephraim and Alban. Deacon Joshua served Christmas Liturgy with Father Michael.

The church glistened with candlelight, poinsettias and a Christmas tree. Special thanks to Matushka Lydia, choir members and parishioners who assisted with the Advent and Nativity services, decorated the church and helped take down all the trimmings. Also, Toni Cherniavsky and Natalie Kruchok for donating the beautiful Christmas Wreaths that adorned the front of our Church. God grant you many years!

Alexis Swan, coordinator of our Christmas stocking project received donations totaling \$1,085.00 from our very generous parishioners. Great job!

COUNCIL FROM 1

Church Ministries Report

A lengthy report was prepared that presented the work of the eleven departments in our church.

Statistical Information and Church Growth

Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff presented information on Church growth and health in the ongoing effort to strengthen parish life and reverse declining membership in older parishes. He stated that the decline is slowing in most of the dioceses. He felt there were two large challenges facing us:

1. Will we be able to keep our parishes open for everyone as some parishes have fewer than 50 people; and
 2. How do we address the "unchurched" people in our society?
- Discussion focused on the need to have people trained to help parishes with church growth coaching needs. There needs to be an organized plan to address church growth and one that has a resource center where people can learn how to grow a church. There also needs to be a good base for clergy and laymen training in the area of parish revitalization.

Statute Revisions

Work began on this in early 2004. After much work and discussion, the Holy Synod agreed to postpone the statute revisions until the 15th AAC. This is due to the amount of work, research, and intense writing that is needed in order to properly update, revise, or create new statute information.

Insurance Report

Many parishes have not adopted the procedures used in sexual misconduct issues. All dioceses and parishes are expected to adopt these procedures and also purchase insurance to cover these procedures.

The spring session of the Metropolitan Council will be held on April 18, 2005 in Syosset, New York.

SVS Open House

CRESTWOOD, NY— For those considering enrolling in seminary there is no better way to begin their exploration than to visit during the academic year. St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary is opening its doors for prospective students to come and explore campus life first-hand this spring during Open House, April 7-9, 2005.

Participants will stay two nights on the seminary's campus, attending the regular schedule of chapel services and classes during their stay. Open House also offers the benefits of a guided tour of campus, as well as an informational session on topics such as degree programs, admission, financial aid, and ministry opportunities. A faculty and student panel will hold a session to field questions about the seminary. Prospective students may also schedule an interview during their stay. Open House participants this spring will experience the seminary's chapel services during the Lenten season.

Excepting travel arrangements, Open House is offered at no expense to participants. To register, complete and mail the Open House registration form available online, or e-mail V. Rev. Steven Belonick, director of recruitment, at belonick@svots.edu. Include your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address. Indicate whether you would like to schedule an interview during your visit.

Open House is offered every fall and spring semester. To view the spring 2005 Open House schedule, a list of items to bring, and travel directions to St Vladimir's Seminary, visit our website, www.svots.edu. For further questions, contact V. Rev. Belonick at (914) 961-8313, ext. 328.

PUBLICATION DEADLINES

April Issue
March 1st

May Issue
April 1st

ONE Stewards prepares 2005 campaign

The ONE Stewards committee held its annual planning meeting in January. The Theme for 2005 is *Our Church and the Future*, tying in with the theme for this year's All American Council. Monies raised through ONE Stewards are used to directly fund programs for Youth, Seminary Scholarships, Charities and Missions within the Diocese of New England.

The financial goal for this year is \$25,000. This year's budget includes increased funding for the seminary scholarship program. All of these programs are important for the future growth of our Diocese and the spreading of the message of the Orthodox Faith.

March has once again been designated **ONE Stewards Month** in our Diocese. Individuals will receive an envelope with a message from His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, in the mail during the month of February.

In addition, each parish will have a coordinator who along with your parish priest will be asking for your support for this worthy cause. They will also help to answer any questions you may have regarding the ONE Stewards program. Volunteers from the ONE Stewards committee will also be visiting some parishes throughout the year. If you wish to receive a visit you may do so by contacting Matuska Cindy Voytovich, chairperson for the committee at 203.453.4405.

The committee thanks those who have helped to support these valuable programs of our Diocese in the past and looks forward to your continued generous support.

PARISHES FROM 7



L-R: Marcia Grzech, newly-chrismated Jill (Juliana) Cole, Fr. Vladimir Alejandro, in Southbury, CT

Heartfelt sympathy extended to the family of Alexander Pawlowski who was laid to rest on December 11. Memory Eternal.

- submitted by Barbara Ann Dixon

Southbury, Connecticut

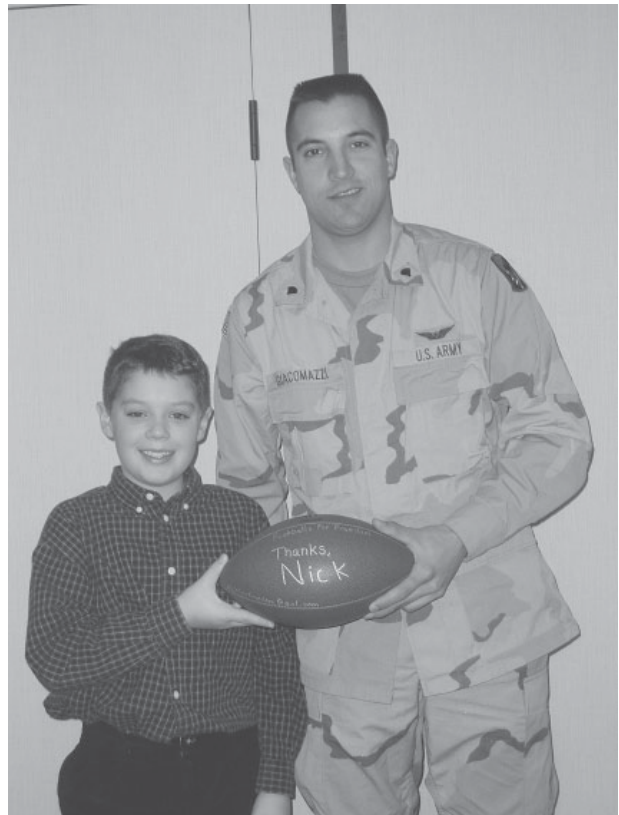
December brings us so many exciting and special moments – this year was no exception. We welcomed St. Nicholas’ annual visit complete with apples to share and gifts on December 5. It was with great joy that we celebrated Christmas together in our new home this year. On December 19, Jillian (Juliana) Cole, standing with her sponsor Marcia Grzech, was Chrismated. We are so happy for Jill, and blessed to have her as a part of our community.

After participating in a class project corresponding with soldiers in Iraq, Nick Fatse, a very thoughtful and

ambitious fourth grader from our community, developed an idea. He and his friends collected over \$3000.00 to purchase and send footballs to soldiers for recreation and down time. We, along with Nick’s family were very proud of him and his thoughtfulness, as he presented a football and promise of hundreds more to come to a soldier who is soon to be deployed.

In closing, I would like to remind you to mark your calendars for our consecration on Saturday, June 4, 2005.

- submitted by Sarah Cole



Nick Fatse, of Christ the Savior Church in Southbury, CT, presents the first “Footballs for Freedom” football to Mike Giacomazzi.

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