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*Youth Rally 2010***Priest John Hopko**

Fr. John Hopko, Diocesan Youth Director, provided the following account of this year's Youth Rally. This issue also includes one young participant's description of her experience. — Ed.

Youth Rally 2010 was held at the Saint Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in Contoocook, N.H. The Center is a camp and retreat center owned and operated by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston. The Rally took place from Monday, August 16, until Saturday, August 21. The Center is the same site at which recent Youth Rallies have been held.

All diocesan youth who have completed fifth grade and have not yet celebrated their 18th birthday can attend the Youth Rally. Adult volunteers serve as pastoral and health staff and as cabin and activity counselors. This year we had 43 children between the ages of 10 and 17 participating as "Rallyers," with 15 adult staff members, for a total of 58 participants.

The theme for Rally 2010 was Mission and Outreach. Fr. Serge Halvorsen delivered a "key-note" address on the subject on Tuesday of Rally Week, Fr. Dennis Rhodes gave an historical overview of Orthodox

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Below: St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Pittsfield, Mass.

*With God all things are possible in Pittsfield***Priest Barnabas Fravel**

"...But with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19.26). These are the reassuring and powerful words our Lord offered to His disciples when asked, "Who then can be saved?" We know these words to be true in that somehow what seems to be impossible, what seems to be insurmountable, what seems to be a bleak future, that, even what seems impossible to man can be, by God's grace, possible.

Over the last 90 years, Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church in Pittsfield, Mass., has had her share of struggles. An outpost in the far west of the diocese of New England, the parish's outlook for the future was uncertain. However, by the grace of God, what had seemed an impossible future is now possible.

I met the parish council of St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in the fall of 2006. The council

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One Rallyer's Experience...

I have been attending Youth Rally for about four years now and with each year comes fun and excitement.

The campers stay in New Hampshire in a comfortable campground setting including cabins, a beach area, woods, a temple, and a dining hall. Activities during camp include arts and crafts, church reading, sports, swimming, canoeing, Confession, a camp fire, and more.

At first, I was excited yet nervous to attend camp. I didn't know a single person and I had never been away from home for so long. However, I found friends almost instantly. The first friend I made at Rally was Brianna. We love to go swimming and hiking together during the week. We always grab the opportunity to canoe once it's available. We also love to jump off of the water trampoline into the lake.

I enjoy attending camp because it's often the only time of the year that I see the friends I've made. The activities are amazing and the people that surround you are even better. I would encourage everyone to attend Youth Rally.

Natalya Chernik
(Cheshire, Conn.)

Rally from 1

missions on Wednesday (with an impromptu addendum about Orthodox Alaska from our Chancellor, Fr. John Kreta, who was visiting for the day), Fr. Vladimir and Suzanne Aleanthro gave a presentation about their mission to the Turkana people of Kenya on Thursday, and on Friday we had a wrap-up session.

The daily schedule for Rally followed the rhythms that have been established during the past Rallies that have been held in Contoocook. Liturgical services are held every morning, afternoon and evening in the chapel. This year we enjoyed the use of the new and improved Rally Service Books prepared by Fr. Dennis Rhodes. Choir Rehearsals and Educational Sessions are held in the earlier part of each day and other activities, such as time at the waterfront, arts and crafts, sports and games, trail-walking, drama club, etc., are held in the latter part of the day. On Thursday evening during Rally we went on a field trip to the Canobie Lake Amusement Park. A highlight of Rally and certainly its appropriate culmination was the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, August 21.

We were saddened that our beloved Diocesan Bishop, His Grace, Bishop Nikon, was not able to visit with us due to his recent surgery and ongoing health issues. With the help of Fr. John Kreta, our Diocesan Chancellor, we did have the chance as a group to communicate with His Grace via speaker phone on Wednesday of Rally Week. [His Grace reported to the Diocesan Assembly on Oct. 29 that the Rallyers sang to him, moving him greatly — Ed.]

In my capacity as Diocesan Youth Director, I served as Rally Rector and Director. Fr. Dennis Rhodes served as a member of the Rally Clergy and as Rally Choir Director. Fr. Serge Halvorsen served as a member of the Rally Clergy and assisted Fr. Dennis with choir directing. Deanna Matty, mother of one of our Rallyers, served as Rally Nurse. A total of ten other adults volunteered as Youth Rally Staff in various capacities, primarily cabin and activity counselors. They were: Katia Arida, Ivey Brown, Joseph Boruch, William Kopcha, Matushka Evelyn Kreta, Julianna Kreta, Phoebe

Latanzi, Sharon Thekla Marshall, Melanie Osuch, Tim Tassmer and Noemy Wecal.

We held a Rally Staff Training Day on Saturday, July 31, at Saints Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, Conn. Just before Rally itself, at the campgrounds in Contoocook, eleven members of Rally Staff gathered on August 15-16 for Rally Staff Orientation and Child Protection Training.

The Child Protection Training session was led by Fr. John Bacon, a priest of the Boston Deanery of our Diocese of New England. Fr. John has certification to lead this kind of training through the Boy Scouts of America, with whom he is a chaplain. Going through this training, which included the viewing of two educational videos, was excellent preparation for Rally Staff. A key part of this preparation was the critical reminder that we always practice "double-deep coverage" at Rally. This means that no one staff member is ever alone with a Rallyer outside of public view.

Youth Rally 2010 cost \$18,910.04 in total operating expenses, not counting the Diocesan Youth Director's stipend or small honoraria to the staff. Fr. Dennis has arranged each year for the past eight years for the use of a school bus for the whole week to be donated by the First Student School Bus Company, for which he is a driver. Also, the staff members drive their own cars to and from and in service of Rally and do not ask for mileage or fuel reimbursement. Many of the staff members also meet the cost of various and sundry items for Rally out of their own pockets.

For 2010, the basic attendance fee for a single child was \$175, or \$300 for a family. We also extended the privilege of attending Rally at a reduced rate to four children from families facing real financial distress.

Donations to the ONE Stewards program of the Diocese of New England are applied each year against the expenses of Youth Rally. We also received a very generous donation in support of Youth Rally from the Men's Club of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, New Britain, Conn.

The annual Diocesan Youth Rally is a significant program for all those who take part in it—children and adults alike. We are deeply grateful to all who make it possible.

Pittsfield from 1

expressed a sincere desire to grow and to build up the Orthodox Church in Berkshire County, however, they needed a plan, and, a priest. Everything else was in place for the parish to make its way into a very real and possible future. The parish council is an amazing cross-section of peoples from all cultures and reflects the blessings and the ideals of the Pan-Orthodox landscape. There is also genuine love for one another in the church community that is essential in beginning a plan for growth. All of these things had come to pass under the shepherding of Fr. Josef Petranin and the dedication of the faithful over the last 35 years.

Fr. Josef, Matushka Julia and their two children came to the United States from Slovakia in 1972. His family had suffered over the years under the socialist system of government. They also had many difficulties as an Orthodox priest and family at the hands of the Uniates in Slovakia. Fr. Josef and Matushka Julia have exemplified in their life, those words, “with God all things are possible.”

Metropolitan Doretheus of the Czech lands and Slovakia blessed Fr. Josef, then chancellor of the Michalovce Diocese, to come to the United States in order to learn the English language. It was understood that Fr. Josef would return within four years and be able to help the church administration in Slovakia, to translate and to teach. But God had other plans both for him and for the parish of St. Nicholas in Pittsfield.

Fr. Josef and his family made their way to the United States with really nothing, leaving all friends and family behind. After a short stay in Connecticut, they agreed to go to Pittsfield and serve the church there.

Fr. Josef was to minister to the small, struggling parish while beginning his education in the English language.

With St. Nicholas Parish struggling financially, Fr. Josef and Matushka Julia both took full time jobs when they came to Pittsfield, putting his study of English on hold. In many years of toil, struggle, and uncertainty, slowly but surely the parish has made progress both spiritually and numerically. Much of this is due to Fr. Josef and some select faithful members of St. Nicholas. And if you ask any of them they will tell you that it has not been easy, but by God’s grace St. Nicholas parish, especially in the last ten years has come from a parish with an uncertain future to a parish that sees herself with an opportunity to be a real pillar of hope and strength in an area where Orthodox Christianity is desperately needed.

The parish’s long time goal was to be able to afford a full time priest and in 2002 the parish was blessed to be beneficiaries of an estate that has allowed, for a small window of time, to afford and care for a full time priest.

The parish allocated the resources and decided to make the most of this window of opportunity. The parish council of St. Nicholas set out on a renewed path to use all of their time, energy, talents for growth. The question was, how can we grow?

The first action may seem obvious to some but can easily be forgotten, and that is prayer. The council came to the conclusion that to begin

Right: Fr. Barnabas Fravel, with Fr. Josef Petranin (seated closest to the projection screen), speaks to the Connecticut Deanery clergy, giving a presentation that developed into this article. Photo: Fr. David Koles



a plan for growth and renewal that they needed to pray. And more than that, they needed to try and make the parish a more fervent house of prayer. Each council member resolved to make prayer the beginning and ending to all that is done in their lives and in the parish.

For Vespers, Liturgy, Feast days, Presantifieds, Akathists, and even some daily services the pact still exists. Nearly all of the parish council members, who agreed that prayer is the place to begin for a church that wants to grow, are fulfilling this pledge to be present and pray.

The parish began to formulate a five year plan for growth, which means not only worship and membership increases, but also the building up of relationships between members. The parish compared the vision of the Church with our own.

We studied the mission statement of the Orthodox Church in America which points to the great commission of our Lord: "Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." This is who we are and what we are supposed to do as Orthodox Christians.

Over much of 2008 and 2009 we went through several exercises as a parish and parish council. First there were sessions where we came together as a parish and tried to identify our weaknesses (i.e. those things that we don't do very well as a parish) and we categorized and ranked them.

Next we went through an exercise where we asked everyone ultimately where they would like to see St. Nicholas parish in 10 years. We encouraged "dream scenarios" (those things which we would love to see but which may seem impossible for our parish).

After we got everyone brainstorming about where they would like to be, we set out to ad-

dress our weaknesses and ways to overcome them.

We established ministry groups to help in the five year plan for growth. These ministry groups are facilitated by council members and they not only encourage participation from non council members but also allow the formal parish council to keep focusing on broader goals.

We have also identified as a weaknesses the need for more space and updated facilities. This led our parish on a search either to renovate our existing structure or to seek out new property opportunities. The process has been grounded in our prayer life as a parish, and currently we are in the process of purchasing a new prop-

erty in Pittsfield which we hope will soon serve as a new home for St. Nicholas Orthodox Church.

Examining our strengths and weaknesses has led to renewed life that somehow makes the work pleasurable. We have all begun to understand, as St. John Chrysostom comments on St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, that, "if you will readily enter upon the contest,

you will love the whole time with pleasure... for nothing is so apt to cause pleasure as a good conscience." Nothing is better than doing our Lord's work.

Our Lord has also blessed us too during this process. In the last three years He has sent more than a dozen men, women and children who have become new members.

We are learning over this time and with constant reminders from our Pastor and Father Emeritus Fr. Josef, that, yes, with God all things are possible. Even though the future might seem dark, continue to pray and work, without giving up, knowing that the seeds planted today will be fruit in another season. Fr. Josef will testify that we may never know where our Lord may take us, but that we should have faith.

And Fr. Josef knows this to be true; after all, he was sent here to study the English language and to take it back to Slovakia, and he will tell you that, up until this day, he has yet to take one class in English.

"Examining our strengths and weaknesses has led to renewed life that somehow makes the work pleasurable."

Poetry comes to Christ the Savior Church, Conn. Diana Vagianos

Dianna Vagianos, a parishioner of Christ the Savior Church, in Southbury, volunteered to facilitate poetry workshops on the Church School theme of the Old Testament for the children and youth of the parish in the winter and spring of 2010. She is a Certified Poetry Therapist and believes that everyone has the gift of poetry and writing. The Women's Group also experienced poetry in June.

On Feb. 21, the pre-school through grade 2 classes wrote a collaborative psalm thanking God. An excerpt from their poem, "Thank you God. Thank you for Everything," reads: "Play the violin and drums to make music/like the wind whistling.//Thank you. Thank you. Amen." Each child contributed two to four lines of gratitude to God.

On April 18, students in grades 3 – 5 wrote psalms with the title, "My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord," from Psalm 145. Mark Yuschak writes, "I see God as light/for the world." Greg Brockett says, "I see God in the altar/of

the church and flowers./...I praise God for flowers and life." Lucy Cuneo writes, "The Lord is good to me when/ I try to be patient.//I praise God for horses."

On May 2, the high school and junior high school students wrote their own proverbs. On March 21, the junior high school students wrote poems inspired by the Song of Moses in Exodus. Dianna also worked with Christ the Savior's Women's Group in June using Jane Kenyon's poem "Let Evening Come." The women wrote two collaborative poems.

The poetry program was well received by the children and their families. All of the poems were published in the church bulletin, giving the students the opportunity to share their words, psalms and prayers with their church family. It is anticipated that this program will be repeated this school year following the church school theme, "The Teachings of Jesus," using the gospels as inspiration for writing.

Psalms

No one is like you O Lord

by James Brockett (junior high school)

No amount of power, money, strength or self-confidence can mimic You.

Lord, you are
un-repeatable
un-mentionable
Amazing
Savior
Almighty

You will plant me

by Megan Curran (junior high school)

We are your seeds.
We will grow with you.
Oh Lord, you are our gardener.
You gave us life and you take care of us.
We trust you with every part of us.
Where you plant, us we will grow.
We will grow for you.
We will grow with you.

Proverbs

Wisdom is having knowledge to do what is right.

The fear of the Lord leads to a greater understanding of Him.

— Dimitrius Haddad (high school)

Wisdom is a turtle in its shell, who can walk in the light of safety, yet withdraw in the presence of evil.

Teach me to plant the seeds of righteousness, and to root out the weeds of the wicked.

Build your house upon the Lord's foundation, for it is firm and cannot be moved, while the foundation of evil can be shaken by the smallest winds.

He who basks in pride and believes in his strength will falter, while the man who fears God will be given eternal life.

Ordination of Dn. Steven Hosking to the Holy Priesthood at St. Alexis Church, Clinton, Conn.

Priest Joshua Mosher



from across the region to celebrate the ordination of Deacon Steven Hosking to the Holy Priesthood. As a deacon, Fr. Steven Hosking had served the parish with the previous rector, Fr. Steven Voytovich, and His Grace, Bishop Nikon concluded he was the natural choice to take up its pastoral leadership.

His Grace, Bishop Nikon presided at the Divine Liturgy in the full-to-capacity church. Around him served eight priests and two deacons,

in addition to the candidate for ordination. Bishop Nikon's voice was fragile after his surgery to remove tumors from his throat, and so he delegated to the diocesan chancellor, Fr. John Kreta, some of the prayers customarily said by the bishop. His Grace did take the opportunity to deliver a charge to the community of St. Alexis to receive the newly-ordained and his family with love.

On Saturday morning, Sept. 18, St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Church, Clinton, Conn., was blessed to raise up one of her own to serve as the new parish priest. The faithful assembled from the local community and

In the course of the liturgy, Fr. Steven's son Andrew was blessed to wear the orarion. At the ordination itself, Protodeacon Paul Nimchek and Deacon John Zarras brought then-Deacon Steven to the altar. Fr. Michael Westerberg, Fr. Vladimir Aleandro, and Fr. Robert Dick each led him around the altar before Bishop Nikon prayed over him.

The ordination culminated in His Grace's ceremonial vesting of Fr. Steven Hosking as a priest, repeatedly proclaiming "Axios!"—he is worthy!—and the assembly responding. The newly ordained Fr. Steven served in the distribution of Holy Communion, and at the end of the liturgy, Bishop Nikon directed his whole

Right: Father Steven Hosking in the Great Procession, before his ordination to the Holy Priesthood. **Above:** He is brought by his fellow deacons to the Altar for his ordination.

Photos: John Barone



family to come forward to be greeted by the people.

Fr. Sergius Halvorsen preached on how each of us may understand our calling. God calls us not for our own glory or to pursue “what we’re awesome at,” but to follow Christ wherever he leads us.

Bishop Nikon also asked Fr. Vladimir Alejandro to deliver an explanation of the meaning of the rite of ordination, which proved eloquent and edifying. Many asked for a written version, but Fr. Vladimir confessed that, while he had prepared in advance, he had no written notes.

Fr. Vladimir began with the truth that we have only one Priest—our Lord Jesus Christ. We the Church are joined to Him, and He makes us a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

Fr. Vladimir said, “Today, from our number, we are raising up out of this royal priesthood one to serve at our head.” To accomplish this, we bring him to the bishop, who represents the

universal Church—not just in space but in time, in the ongoing tradition from the Apostles. As the candidate for ordination is lead around the Lord’s altar, we sing hymns: “of the Martyrs, because the priest is called to be a witness after the One Witness, to suffer as He suffered; of the Apostles, because he is called to uphold and carry out the apostolic preaching and teaching; of the Incarnation, because all of us depend on the saving mystery of our God made flesh.”

After having offered the candidate to our High Priest for ordination to the Holy Priesthood, the bishop then shows him to us, presenting the signs of his new office, saying “Axios!” And we join him in affirming that he is truly worthy. Then all are united “as the Lord makes this one the leader of this community of St. Alexis, united in the Eucharist.” Fr. Vladimir concluded, “Just as the Holy Spirit makes the bread and wine we offer to be the Body and Blood of Christ, so He makes this man a priest to serve in His Church.”

Below: On Sunday, September 26, **Jeffrey Frate was ordained to the Holy Diaconate** by His Grace, Bishop Nikon at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Boston. Vested in white, Frate is brought through the Royal Doors to the Altar.



Impossible Commands Priest Sergius Halvorsen

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says some pretty amazing things in the Bible, things that are hard to understand, things that test the strength and depth of our faith. But of all Jesus’ commandments, one of the most difficult is the command to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27–28). But could it be that this particular commandment is simply impossible?

Just look around, there are so many people these days who are out to get us, and in difficult economic times, you really need to look out for “number one” because if you don’t take care of yourself, who will? Certainly, we are called to love God, and to love our neighbor, but doesn’t this only apply to our good neighbors? If we treat everyone around us with love and kindness, ultimately someone is going to walk all over us, take what is ours and leave us to perish. Surely, Jesus did not mean to say that we should love *these* people. Did He?

In fact, He did.

Impossible to 11

All Saints Church, Hartford, Conn.

Archpriest William DuBovik

Participation in the Dormition was heightened this year, with the Feast coming on a Sunday, allowing more worshippers to be present at Liturgy.

Following the service, a Feast Day brunch was held in the auditorium, providing delicious food, under the preparation of Nick Medynski, Chris Evans and Dave Vargas, and fellowship. And since it was Fr. William's birthday, a cake was shared by all in his honor, and the singing of Many Years was offered.

The Church was filled with flowers for the traditional blessing. Also, the Vargas family provided flowers to be blessed and distributed to worshippers. And Ola Ferla and Phyllis Sturtevant arranged special floral displays for the icons of Christ and our Holy Mother on the iconostasis.

We shared the joy of the Szymczyk and Natale families as Daniella Marie, infant daughter of Elizabeth Szymczyk and Danny Natale, was Baptized and Chrismated. Many Years!

The singing of Many Years rang out again in honor of Fr. Joseph and Matushka Delphy Irvin who left the parish, as Father becomes interim pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Bridgeport. They had been serving and worshipping at All Saints while Fr. Joseph served as a supply priest for the Deanery. The parish shared a cake in their honor, and presented them with a plant as a remembrance.

Through special collections, we assisted FORCC (Fellowship of Orthodox Churches in Connecticut) and its work to assist with the

Hartford to 9

SS. Peter & Paul Church, Meriden, Conn.

John S. Nyghyew

We have been busy at SS. Peter and Paul in Meriden, CT. We celebrated the Feast of SS. Peter & Paul with festal services and a potluck dinner. In July, we welcomed Bishop Nikon for his annual visit to our Parish. After Liturgy, we held a luncheon in his honor.

In early August, we participated in National Night Out. The event is sponsored by the City of Meriden in the park across the street from our Church. We were among the 60 local organizations that were part of the event. We served lemonade and offered tours of our Church.

Also in August, Father Justin Matthews, Executive Director of FOCUS North America, paid us a visit to talk about the mission of FOCUS and discuss how our Parish might be able to help FOCUS grow in the southern New England area. FOCUS is a pan-Orthodox

ministry devoted to charitable outreach in North America. Father Justin gave a presentation on Christian charitable outreach and how FOCUS is making a difference to those in need.

Meriden to 10

Right: Members of SS. Peter & Paul Church welcome His Grace, Bishop Nikon, as he makes in his annual archpastoral visitation.



Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, Conn.

Sarah Cole

We have wonderful news for those who have been following Father Vladimir and Matushka Suzanne's African journey! All things are in place for the start of the bore hole well in Turkana. Through the efforts of OCMC's Fr. Martin and those parishes who have sponsored a Walk for Water, money and support have been arriving. So far through the FORCC (Fellowship of Orthodox Churches in Connecticut) collection over \$9,000 has been donated, with several churches still planning to host a walk. At Christ the Savior we had 46 walkers and raised \$4,450 on August 28.

Three of our small groups have been at work incorporating prayer and fellowship in unique ways. The Women's Group held a journal workshop presented by Dianna Vagionios Miller, a certified poetry therapist. Gifted Hands, a crafting group, has begun making products to sell for the benefit of the Turkana people, and the Christian Book Club is currently reading *The Illuminated Heart*, by Frederica Matthews Green.

We welcome our two interns from St. Vladimir Seminary, working on a field study with

our parish this year: Michael Soroka and Deacon Dunstan Lyon. We look forward to their input and perspective through the coming year.

With great rejoicing we marked the ordination of the sixth son and member of our parish to the Priesthood. Axios, Fr. Steven Hosking! Many years to Deacon Dimitrios Belsito, the third son of our parish to serve the Lord as a deacon!

On September 26 we welcomed a special friend of our community, Rosalie Cummings as she entered the catechumenate, and we look forward to her Chrismation into the Church.

We also wish farewell to one of our founders and a most amazing woman, Frances Perkins, who will be moving to Texas. We will miss Frances, and know she will bring her 1000 watt smile and astounding life story with her to share with others.

Our Live Wire Sunday school students and youth group have begun their yearly studies, incorporating the youth choir, led by Fr. Sergius Halvorsen, and studies of our parish-wide annual theme: "Jesus Christ, His Life and Teaching".

Below: Some of the participants in Christ the Savior's **Walk for Water** in Southbury, Conn.
Photo: Evelyn Sasko



Hartford from 8

Turkana Water Project. [See the previous issue of the ONE for more details —Ed.]

Meanwhile efforts continue to assist Foodshare in feeding the hungry, and to provide small gift items for troops in Afghanistan.

Our parishioners gathered for the first varniki workshops of the season as we readied for our 37th annual Russian Tea Room and Bazaar. The Bazaar this year began with a concert by the Yale Russian Chorus 6:30 Friday, November 5. The Bazaar continued with free admission 10-4 Saturday, November 6, and noon to 3 p.m Sunday, November 7, with ethnic foods to eat in or take out, frozen foods, baked goods, ethnic gift items including Matroshka dolls, amber jewelry and much, much more; along with beautiful hand painted Pysanky.

Meriden from 8

Our Brotherhood sponsored a trip to see the New Britain Rock Cats. They have been talking about visiting the ballpark for a number of summers, but with parish events and vacations, they haven't been able to set a date. This year Joe Uliase "stepped up to the plate," picked a date, and made it happen. We had great seats and enjoyed the game. Maybe next year we'll try to get to two games!

We have also started planning for our 100th anniversary of the founding of our Parish on Columbus Day weekend, October 8-9, in 2011. Our kick off event was a concert performed by the Yale Russian Chorus on October 17. We also have been busy preparing for our Annual Bazaar on November 6 at our Community Center.

We expect to have several more events in our 100th anniversary year. Stay tuned for more information.

Below: Fr. Justin Mathews of FOCUS North America speaks to the public in SS. Peter & Paul Church, Meriden, Conn., on "How to love our neighbor as Christ loves us."

Photo: John Barone



Poetry from 5

Wise men herd the sheep of truth,
and protect them from the wolves
of corruption

— Anton Krayniy (high school)

Wisdom is allowing yourself to fail, and learning again.

Teach me to forgive and forget, without looking back.

The house of my soul
can remain standing after any storm, and let the light in after.

The fear of the Lord holds us back, and also strengthens.

Give me instruction to live in happiness without regret.

A wise person has lived through all experiences good and bad,
and shares them with others, motivating them.

— Julia Brockett (high school)

Women's Group

Let Evening Come

Come into the light and see the darkness with joy.

May I deal with the many distractions in life and learn to pray unceasingly for we were made for peace and calmness of heart.

Come, O Lord.

Let evening come.

My carefree days of childhood are gone.

My busy hectic time is past.

What now? Let it come, as it will.

Help me not to be afraid. God is with me.

Evening is coming, I now know.

Let evening come. I am ready by the grace of God.

This poem is inspired by Jane Kenyon's poem "Let Evening Come" and is written by Brenda Peterson, Pauline Fox, Matushka Suzanne, Pauline Dionis and Kathy Johnson.

Impossible from 7

Christ says to us in St. Luke's Gospel that if someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other cheek, and if someone takes your coat, offer your shirt as well. He says that we should give to every one who begs from us, and if someone takes what is ours, don't ask for it back. But this sounds absolutely crazy. What kind of foolishness is this? It is, quite simply, the foolishness of the Cross. As St. Paul says, the Cross is foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). The Gentiles to which St. Paul was referring were primarily citizens and residents of the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire was founded and maintained by the sword, through the bone crushing power of its armies. "Survival of the fittest," has always been the way of the world: the strong survive at the expense of the weak, who are crushed and devoured. But this is not the way of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus asks, "If you love those who love you, what credit is it to you?" In other words, if "love" does not cost you something, then it is not the love of God. "Love" that does not involve a personal sacrifice for the good of another is not love at all. It may be a convenient exchange of pleasantries to ensure good business relations, but it is not love. The love of God is the love of the Christ on the Cross. It is the love that Jesus showed to the Roman soldiers when he prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," as they pounded the metal spikes through his hands and feet (Luke 23:34). It is the love that Christ shows to every one of us in the free gift of his Broken Body and Spilled Blood. And on our own this kind of love is impossible for us. But with God, all things are possible (Mark 10:27).

United to God the Father, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we are able to love

the unlovable people in our lives, and this is the miracle of faith. When love seems impossible, when that least-lovable person in your life does that one thing that drives you absolutely crazy, that is the moment that true Christian love is possible.

In that moment, we cry out, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner" firm in our faith that He gives us the grace to love when love is otherwise impossible. Then, filled with the gracious love of God we offer ourselves to our neighbor in love, as Christ offers Himself to us in love. And in so doing, we are filled with immeasurable joy.

The commandments of Jesus Christ are impossible, because God does not desire that we merely live according to the flesh, in the realm of meager possibilities of this world. Rather, God gives Himself to us, so that we can do the impossible; so that we can follow Jesus Christ on the way of the Cross; so that we can lead a life that is otherwise impossible. For the Christian life is that which God makes possible through His own impossible, sacrificial love for us.

KW

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korbanworkshop@wildblue.net
www.korbanworkshop.com

Address: 2715 Chilafoux Road
Brownington, Vermont 05860

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Rev. Joshua Mosher, Editor

Phone: 203-237-4539

Send all articles and photos to:

frjmosher@sspeterpaul.org
50 Shady Crest Road
Meriden CT 06450

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frjmosher@sspeterpaul.org
203-237-4539
50 Shady Crest Road
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Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church
PO Box 2876
305 Washington Avenue
New Britain CT 06050-2876

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- Dec 8** Diocesan Council in Springfield, Mass.