

O. N. E.

ORTHODOX NEW ENGLAND

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Right: His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon blesses new icons at Holy Trinity, Willimantic. Fr. Marc Vranes, rector of the parish, stands behind him.



Blessing Ten New Icons

Tim Fetzko

Rejoicing in the third major event in as many years, the community of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Willimantic, Conn., enhanced by the presence of its Diocesan hierarch, His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon, celebrated The Blessing of the New Icons on Sunday, October 14, 2018, at the conclusion of Divine Liturgy.

The project of ten full length icons, each measuring 28" x 67", was entrusted to iconographer Cveta Marinova of Sofia, Bulgaria. The first four icons, all studies of early church

fathers, were received in August, 2017, while the final six icons, all female saints, were completed in July, 2018. Installed by local businessman, Mr William Bender, the canvas-based icons were applied onto smooth and prepared walls, giving the impression they are frescoes which were painted directly onto the walls.

The catalyst for having traditional Byzantine iconography on the east and west walls came, ironically, after the interior of Holy Trinity was completely painted in September, 2016, as Holy Trinity prepared for its Centennial

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2018 Diocesan Assembly in Hartford

Three Questions for the Diocese

Rebekah Lee

This year's Assembly addressed these 3 questions: Who are we? What are we doing? Where are we going?

His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon offered some wisdom about Thomas. He may not have been thinking about the wounds themselves when he said, "Show me." It's about the mystery of the crucifixion. Jesus has offered us his whole self that we may become his holy church, the archbishop said.

It was reported that there is a shortage of clergy throughout the OCA. His eminence urged the assembly to talk more about serving the church and encouraging people to go to seminary.

The diocese website now has a new video (first presented at the All-American Council) about outreach featuring our archbishop.

Fr. Vladimir Aleandro, rector of Christ the Savior, Southbury, Conn., gave the first presentation of the assembly. He spoke about the connections between missionary work he has done here in Connecticut and the mission in Africa.

He reminded us that in order to answer the 3 questions in the theme for the assembly, we must look inward. Honest self reflection is required. Missionary work is needed everywhere all the time in order to help others do this.

We must not get bogged down in trivial matters that arise within our church. To that end, we must ask ourselves, "Is your world your parish, or is your parish the world?"

When there is something we want to accomplish or a problem to solve we think a lot about why it won't work, but

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What is our plan of action?

Greg Dresko

This past Sunday, our parish filled again. There was crying, laughter, giggling, even some fighting and some warranted scolding. I promise the scolding was not directed at me—this time. It was good noise, it was wonderful to see and more importantly the building felt full of life once again. It brought back memories of my childhood from 20 years ago when I would wake up on Sunday morning and excitedly check the altar boy serving schedule. We had so many altar servers (we had 26 in all at one point) that my father had to create teams and a rotation, and I always hoped it was my week to serve. Good Friday and Paschal services required you to arrive at least 30 minutes early just to get a parking spot in the lot and a place to sit in the pew. Communion on a normal Sunday could take up to 15 minutes and our church school had 10 teachers with full classes.

It has been a while since our church has been filled like this. Unfortunately, there was a reason it was different this week. We had church school and St. Nick was coming to visit our children so we had a full house. Pascha Sunday is the only other Sunday it feels like this, when we have our Easter Egg hunt. However, even on normal church school Sundays, we struggle to fill more than half the pews. We do have a central core of younger parishioners now that are starting to take on major responsibilities at the church. We are one of the fortunate communities in New England though: we are growing from within through lifelong parishioners having children and growing families, but that alone is not sustainable. We have lost many families over the years and it feels

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Above: Members of St. Alexis gather for the **blessing of Long Island Sound.**



Blessing of Long Island Sound

Below: Fr. Steven Hosking plunges the cross into the waters.

Rev. Steven Hosking

On Sunday, Jan. 6, following Liturgy, the community of the parish of St Alexis took the short trip to the Clinton Town Beach for the service of the Great Blessing of Water and the blessing of the waters of Long Island Sound.

This annual tradition had been interrupted over the past few years because of poor weather. This year, however, despite being somewhat breezy, the weather was suitable for the service.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters crying:
 “Come, one and all,
 receive the Spirit of wisdom,
 the Spirit of understanding,
 the Spirit of the fear of God, //
 from Christ Who now has
 shone forth!”

More pictures of the blessing of Long Island Sound can be found on our Facebook page (@stalexisorthodox) or on Instagram (st.alexisorthodox).

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Above: Members of St. Alexis stand at the shore of Long Island Sound.



Questions from 2

we must work together and go on, and eventually it will work. Ask yourself what is in your heart that is holding you back. The solution may come from an unexpected place. Be curious and turn to God. Father recommended the book, *Didn't See It Coming*, by Carey Nieuwhof.

Fr. Vladimir also talked about tribal thinking. It's good insofar as it is part of our identity and helps us make a community, but it can be taken too far. We must not exclude or alienate anyone because they are not a member of the tribe.

Asked about cooperation among parishes, Fr. Vladimir replied that we have been encouraged to reach out to other churches in our area whenever there is some help we could offer. We could help each other to accomplish outreach projects. We could share resources.

Fr. Vladimir also stated New England is prime missionary territory because the

population is continuously changing. This may be due to the economy. We must do something to answer the issue of isolation in today's technological society with online outreach and parishes that are welcoming to newcomers. We must think of ourselves as missionaries all the time. There is a shortage of clergy overall, but we all can reflect Jesus to the world. Combining churches is not bad; it may just be a necessary response to a changing population. It is important to remember that the church is not these walls, but all of God's people.

Fr. John Hopko gave his report on Youth Rally. The camp's needs are changing and they are asking for a larger donation next year. Father also said he will be stepping down from running this event and is looking for the next generation of people to run it.

Fr. Peter Carmichael from Holy Trinity, Springfield, Vt., gave the second presentation of the Assembly. His is a small, well-established parish. Fr. Peter has a military chaplain background, and

he spoke about how helpful his wife's experience in psych nursing was before they started teaching about abnormal psychology in seminary.

Renovations were done in the 70's. They have had a stable priestly ministry, and they never close for weather. Fr. Peter attributes the parish's success to dedicated choir directors, a devout core of parishioners and smooth administrative operations. Clear communications, schedules and transparency are at the heart of everything they do. They have a good website that works for them, but other types of media and advertising have not been effective. The community involvement they do, especially during their grinder sales, is important, but it hasn't converted anyone. He said the biggest asset of this parish is how welcoming they are as a community.

Fr. Peter spoke about how the church supports itself. He talked about how important it is to do fund raising events that speak to the personality of the community. His church holds grinder sales 5 times a year; this is a big part of the total income for the parish. This, the cell tower on the property and money from the collection basket during services is all the church needs to support itself. Fr. Peter does have a full time job besides being a pastor, and this has always been the case for this parish.

He talked about how wonderful it is when people rally around a project for a good cause, but we must beware of letting people's focus be too narrow on the project.

Fr. Peter talked about the recent success he has seen with helping seniors in the parish to come up with a plan to make it easier to make a bequest to the church the way they really want to in the last chapter of life.

He then spoke about youth leaving the church. Young people often move away and they are not heard from. How can we speak to this age group to make

them want to at least continue to attend church? Maybe there is nothing wrong—children grow up and get jobs and move out, and this is the way of the world, but sometimes we have no way of knowing.

Fr. Peter urged parents to always take your children to church. Never stop, because you will always matter to your children. There may be a lack of community or connections for youth in the church. How can we address this?

In response to this, Fr. John Hopko spoke about his experience with Youth Rally. He said sex is a huge issue for youth that come of age. Kids ask about sex, go out and do what they want anyway, and then stop going to church. Parents often look to priests for what to do. It has been expected of our youth rally director to be the one to broach this topic. The suggestion was made that more parents could be more courageous in holding this line with their children in the home. A study by Greek Archdiocese was discussed; they found a few questions indicate whether children will remain committed into adulthood: do children see parents pray, is faith and living your faith part of your day to day life at home? The work of Pan Orthodox United on youth retention was also mentioned.

Divorce was discussed. Divorce is the number one reason people stop going to church. It was also discussed that maybe there is a way to speak to people in their 30's to make them want to keep coming to church.

The concept of community in parish life was discussed. Every parish is different and has a different personality. Some people come from very far away. How can we develop our sense of community in parish life considering this? The assembly was reminded that good sermons and honest, open relationships are vital to this.

It was discussed how people sometimes are like the frog in boiling water who

don't know that there is something wrong or don't know what to do until it's too late. How do we address change in this situation? A fervor on the part of one person is important to get something started, but persistence is just as important. Whoever has an idea for something to do in the church needs encouragement and resources. It is also important to remember that failure is not really failure, it's a learning experience.

Fr. James from All Saints in Hartford was asked about how he inspires zeal in his parishioners. He said he puts the emphasis on the people. He encourages people to come with new ideas and try them out. He helps people with guidance and funding. He also encourages people to take things on themselves instead of passing the buck.

Struggling parishes were discussed. There is currently no definitive plan in place for a parish that is disbanding. The diocese does go in and helps a parish that is struggling, but the difficult conversation in the case of a parish that must close sometimes needs to happen. The assembly was reminded that this is a necessary part of life sometimes, and it's okay. People often don't like change, but it's necessary.

Fr. John Jillions, former Chancellor of the OCA, now pastor of Holy Ghost, Bridgeport, Conn., was the last to present to the assembly. He began by giving a background of his spiritual journey and what led to him choosing the priesthood. He told us about the transformative compassion, forgiveness, and mercy shown to him by his confessor in a moment of crisis. He said a willingness to meet God and listen and be changed became very important for him.

Fr. Jillions discussed how important it is that we share what we have and what we know with those 'outside the camp'. In Jesus' example, there is no one outside of his compassion.

Fr. Jillions went on to talk about religion vs. spirituality. How do we add one to the other? He said there is no formula, but discernment is important and the path is different for everyone. We could all benefit from adding more spirituality to our religion, and vice versa. It is important to be clear about and firmly grounded in our faith so that others can see that. Sanctity is attractive to people, especially seekers. Youth Rally happens in a beautiful, natural place for a reason.

He gave us an example of an inspiring day he had playing hooky from an important meeting at Walden Pond. He said there were a lot of people there, but it was still quiet and meditative. Inspiration was discussed further, and those in attendance were invited to share inspiring moments and experiences. We were reminded that there is access to the spiritual all around us, and divine inspiration is when you do what makes you happy.

It was asked how can we practice unconditional acceptance while encouraging healing and repentance? In response to this, we were reminded that God has all the time in the world to wait for people to ask for repentance. There is a right time and place for everyone. We are all flawed, and maybe that is something we need to come to terms with first. We must remember Jesus' example. Listening can be very difficult. Discerning when to say something is important.

The assembly was reminded that holiness is beautiful, but it can also be challenging because we feel like it can be a lot to live up to. Each person's relationship with God is crucial and very personal.

Rebekah Lee was a delegate to the Assembly from Christ the Savior, Southbury, Conn. She gave a version of this report to the parish on Nov. 18, 2018.

Icons from I

Celebration the following month. Prior to the painting, many of the existing mounted icons, of various shapes, sizes, and styles, were removed, and what was left were empty walls. While many enjoyed the simplicity, even the starkness, of the bare walls, it seemed as if, since this is an Orthodox Church, that the walls fairly begged for hand written icons, appropriate and beautiful, that would identify the building clearly as a cherished house of God intended for prayer and communion with him.

“This wonderful set of icons is such an incredible addition to our church,” HTOC Parish Council President, Webmaster, and professional photographer, Mr Timothy Fetzko, wrote in an email to Ms. Marinova on July 2, 2018. “The size and presence each of them brings, makes an Orthodox believer truly feel like they are worshiping under the peaceful and

instructive gaze of heavenly saints.”

Ms. Marinova began her work in December, 2017, and finished the ten icons twenty months later, as she promised she would.

“The results far exceeded our expectations,” Holy Trinity pastor, V. Rev. Marc Vranes, said. “In the Book of Hebrews, the writer describes saints as a cloud of witnesses (12:1), which is very appropriate in the case of our icons. Each of the ten represents a person who lived between the first and fourth centuries, when

persecutions abounded and many Christians were martyred. I have always been intrigued by the early work of early church fathers, and equally, if not more, by the contributions made by female saints, whose sacrifices were either diminished, or not brought to light at all. It was important for the icons chosen to reflect the work of those in the early church.”

“It would be unfair if I did not offer a thought on our iconographer, Ms Marinova, whose work is simply masterful,” Father Marc continued. “What a joy she was to work with. She was extremely respectful, far beyond what I had a right to expect.... Cveta had pointed out to me that she had grown particularly close to the six female saints she wrote for our church, and how difficult it was for her to let them go prior to the overseas shipment.... On the day the icons were blessed by Archbishop Nikon, I felt a strong sense of Cveta's presence in the church.”

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Below Left: One of ten icons **Ms. Marinova wrote for Holy Trinity: Saint Ignatius of Antioch**—student of Apostle & Evangelist John the Theologian; 3rd century bishop of Antioch. He wrote much on ecclesiology, sacraments, and the role of bishops. Martyred in 108.

Below Right: Saint Thekla of Antioch, who preached the Gospel of the Lord; a follower of Saint Paul, she is named Equal to the Apostles.



Life at St. Mark's, Kingston, Mass.

Top: Diocesan Chancellor John Kreta leads the Great Entrance with Boston Dean Fr. Vasily Lickwar (right) and Fr. James Robinson (left).



Later, Fr. John Bacon presented Fr. James Robinson an icon of St. Mark of Ephesus in thanksgiving for his 12 years of service at St. Mark of Ephesus Orthodox Church in Kingston, Mass.



Middle Left: Fr. James and M. Ellen Robinson speak with members of St. Mark's.



Middle Right: On October 28, the parish also celebrated a baking contest.

Below: The Children's Harvest Fair was held on the same day.





Above: The St. Nicholas Choir sings for guests during "Christmas in Salem."

St. Nicholas participates in Christmas in Salem

M. Manna Whitfield

On Dec. 1 and 2, St. Nicholas in Salem, Mass., participated in the 39th annual Christmas in Salem, a walking tour of decorated historic houses and public places. This year's theme coincided with a 350th anniversary celebration of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and featured buildings within the neighborhood of the House of Seven Gables.

This was a wonderful opportunity to open our doors to the wider neighborhood and our handicapped access renovation project was completed in the nick of time! Welcoming over 2,500 guests over the course of two days, our choir also held four mini-concerts which highlighted music from the services of Great Vespers, Divine Liturgy, Holy Week and Pascha. The music highlighted the breadth and depth of our hymnography spanning Byzantine chant to contemporary composers within the American Orthodox experience. Volunteers from the parish

helped to serve as guides, answering questions about the history of the parish as well as explaining much of the iconography done by Anna Gouriev over the past six years.

What a joy it was to be able to fling open the doors and issue the proclamation to "Come and see!" We hope that this will bolster our on-going efforts to be a more present neighbor within the greater Salem community.

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Below: St. Nicholas Church was seasonally decorated for the weekend festival.



Above: Another view of St. Nicholas prepared for "Christmas in Salem."

Plan from 2

like ages ago that our church was filled on a weekly basis like when I was a child. So, what are we doing and why?

That was the "theme" of the 55th Diocesan Assembly of New England this year. I was fortunate enough to represent Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in New Britain as our delegate for a second consecutive year. I'll be honest—last year I listened. I zoned out at times. I doodled on my paper and responded to an email while the reports were read. I may have even passed a level or two of Candy Crush while the goings-on of the assembly were occurring. I listened and paid attention to the speakers but it was the same thing as all the other years. This year was supposed to be different. We were supposed to accomplish more.

Our Diocese is struggling and our parishes are feeling less and less full as time goes on. Similar to my parish above, even if there is some internal growth at other parishes, it is not sustainable without some sort of plan of action for the Diocese as a whole. Additionally, some parishes remain unfilled as far as priests go. Most

parishes have lost parishioners and with it, sustainable finances to successfully run a parish long-term. Finally, parishes continue to get older as young people continue to leave the church.

These issues as well as the discussion of how to help the Diocese grow was supposed to be a major topic of discussion at the assembly, along with the 20 questions we had to prepare for. The reality is that these conversations never occurred. Every time a topic was breached, I hoped for constructive discussion only to hear the same two or three voices that are always willing to speak up. We were left to wonder why the discussion died. So, I ask here again:

Are we closing/consolidating parishes in New England? If so, when? Which ones?

What are we doing to help our diocese move forward and grow? What's our plan of action?

What are we doing to bring people (particularly young people) into the Orthodox faith? What are we doing to keep them from leaving?

As a delegate at this assembly, I have no answers to bring back to my parish council. I can't even point them in the direction the Diocese is moving. But I

do know that we should not be questioning the Orthodox faith and what's wrong with it. The world around us is changing but that does not mean that we need to change the Orthodox faith. I leave you with this quote from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. I pray and ask for your prayers that the leaders of our Diocese have these difficult discussions calmly and reflectively to answer the questions so we can quickly figure out "What are we doing and why?"

From the religious point of view, nothing is more harmful than to live by illusions in an artificially recreated past, seeking in 'ancient, venerable and colorful rites' an escape from a prosaic and burdensome present. Such a religious attitude, quite common in our days, openly contradicts the Christian faith, which is aimed at transforming life and not at supplying religious substitutes for life. To understand this study as an appeal simply to restore the past is to misunderstand it, for there is no simple restoration, nor can there ever be. Equally harmful, however, is the

attitude which rejects the past simply because it is past.... If we do not believe that the Holy Spirit guides the Church today as He guided her yesterday and shall guide her until the end of the world, that Christ is 'the same yesterday, and today, and forever' (Heb. 13:8), then obviously we do not believe in the Church, and she is either a precious 'cultural heritage' to be preserved or an archaic past to be discarded.

"If, however, we believe in the Church, then the study of her past has only one goal: to find, and to make ours again and again, that which in her teaching and life is truly eternal, i.e. which precisely transcends the categories of past, present and future and has the power to transform our lives in all ages and in all situations.

(Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water & The Spirit*, 149-50)

Greg Dresko was delegate to the Assembly from Holy Trinity, New Britain.

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ONE Stewards: "Giving Above And Beyond"

The Diocese again exceeded the ONE Stewards budget level of \$22,000 in donations during 2018. His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon, and the Diocesan Council are very appreciative to all of you throughout the Diocese who support ONE Stewards each year.

The "Bishop's Circle" of donors (\$500 or more) added five new members in 2018. This select group of donors truly set an outstanding example of "Giving Above And Beyond" with over \$12,000 in donations which was more than half of the 2018 amount received. ***Join the Bishop's Circle team in 2019!***

Special Appeal in 2019

The cost of the annual Youth Rally in 2019 will be increasing significantly. The Greek Orthodox camp in New Hampshire where the rally is held will be raising their charges for housing, food, and other incidentals. As a result, there will be a major increase to our Youth Rally total cost. In order to keep the individual registration fee affordable, **ONE Stewards** provides the extra support to meet the Youth Rally costs. The Youth Rally has had fantastic growth over the years. Many who attend will be future leaders in the church. **We are asking that you consider supporting our Youth by donating for the first time or adding to your annual ONE Stewards donation this year to help defray the increased costs for the Youth Rally. ONE +**

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<http://www.dneoca.org>.

Upcoming Events

March 15	Deadline for the next issue of the ONE
April 19	Diocesan "Rally after Rally" Youth Event at All Saints, Hartford
May 4	Fr. Paul Tarazi, "On Paul and Scripture," at Christ the Savior, Southbury, Connecticut Bible Lecture Series
June 21	Diocesan "Rally after Rally" Youth Event at All Saints, Hartford
Aug. 12-17	Diocesan Youth Rally