

*And He shall have dominion from sea to sea
and from the river to the ends of the earth
(Ps 71.8)*



*Et il dominera de la mer a la mer, et depuis
le fleuve jusqu'aux extremités de la terre
(Ps 71.8)*

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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Reception of Monastic Community in Kamloops

by His Grace SERAPHIM, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada

An extraordinary series of events occurred recently in British Columbia. After a long and difficult pilgrimage by a pair of former Anglican monks, the Archdiocese of Canada now has a skete, Mount St. Nicholas, in Kamloops. The superior of Mt. St. Nicholas is Priestmonk Simeon Edward (Weare), a man of over thirty years' pastoral experience. A graduate of the Universities of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, he has served as an examining chaplain in his Anglican diocese, scrutinising locally those seminary graduates being considered for ordination. He has also held other senior positions of supervisory responsibility. Among us he joins a few other priests with similar experience who, as he did, took time and careful self-examination to be certain before wholeheartedly embracing Orthodox Christianity.

Father Simeon Edward has had many years of monastic formation and has known and been known by Orthodox Christians for a long time. For those who have known him over the years, it is his serious desire to do God's will together with a lively sense of humour, his care for people, and his ability to preach colourfully that have been his distinguishing marks. He has many spiritual children and has developed a broad network of those who support and pray for one another, following the canonical hours daily. When it finally became time for him to embrace Orthodoxy openly and fully, rapid changes were needed, because of the distance from the Bishop, and because of the isolation of the community from our other parishes.

Both monks of the skete, Simeon Edward and Christopher Ephrem (Phelan) were Chrismated by Fr. Lawrence Farley at St. Herman's Church in Surrey, B.C. Then, on arrival of the Bishop, both monks were tonsured at the Vigil of the Cross on September 13th in Vancouver at Holy Resurrection Church. There two days later monk Simeon Edward was ordained to the Holy Diaconate during the Altar Feast Liturgy of the parish. A

week later, during the Divine Liturgy, Hierodeacon Simeon Edward was ordained to the Holy Priesthood at St. Herman's Church, Surrey. This was followed by two days of serving Liturgy in Surrey, and on the third day Fr. Simeon Edward entered hospital in Kamloops for surgery!

The parishes of Annunciation / St. Nicholas, Ottawa and St. Herman, Surrey have given material aid so as to enable proper serving of the Divine Liturgy and other services at Mt. St. Nicholas Skete. The support of any others will help greatly. The monks need our prayers as they pass through the time of adjustment. In due course, after some months have passed and the two monks have become better rooted, the faithful in the western parts of our Archdiocese will have an excellent place of retreat nearer to hand than ever before. Moreover, since it has been a clear call from God that this community minister especially with intercession, if the faithful wish to send names of the living and the departed to the skete they will be assured of being remembered. And of course any offerings will be a blessing. Please pray for this new skete in central B.C., and make use of its facilities as God leads you. The address is:

Mount St. Nicholas Skete
Hieromonk Simeon Edward (Weare), superior
4655 West Syde Road
Kamloops, B.C. V2C 1Z3
Phone: 604-579-9150



L to R: Bp. Seraphim, Fr. Mel Gimmaka, Hieromonk Simeon Edward, Fr. Lawrence Farley, Monk Christopher Ephrem at St. Herman's Church, Surrey

Ukrainian Centennial Commemoration at Star, Alberta

by Fr. Larry Reinheimer, Lakeland Mission

The year 1991 is the centennial of the first Ukrainian settlement in Canada. And since that first settler eventually settled in the Star, Alberta area and was one of the original founders of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church there, special celebrations were held by the parish on August 31 to mark this historic event. In September 1891 Iwan Pylypow and his friend Wacil Eleniak set out for Canada from Nebeliw, Ukraine, having heard rumours of free land and opportunity in Canada. Iwan tried to convince others to come with them, but they wanted proof, so Iwan and Wacil set out to find it.

When they reached Winnipeg, Wacil obtained a job and decided to stay there. Iwan continued on to the Lethbridge area in search of Don Krebs, a German friend from student days in Austria. Krebs and his group of settlers had moved to Josephburg, east of Edmonton, so Iwan went as far as Calgary where he discovered the railroad to Edmonton was not yet complete and with winter rapidly approaching, he decided not to go any further. But he had seen enough of Canada to assure his neighbours in Ukraine of the opportunity for a better life. Returning to Nebeliw, he started organising a group of his neighbours to immigrate to Canada. When the authorities found out what he was doing, they jailed him until the spring of 1893. While he was imprisoned, seven families, taking his advice, left for Canada in 1892. Five of the families settled in Winnipeg while two (Nikola Tychowsky and Anton Paish) went on to settle in Josephburg.

After being released from jail, Iwan and his family together with the Stephan Chichak family headed for Canada in May, 1893. The Chichaks went as far as Winnipeg while the Pylypows continued on to Josephburg. Immediately they

built a cabin in the area and set about making the land farmable and re-establishing their lives. But the next spring a fire destroyed their new home. About that time three others families had arrived from Nebeliw, and Iwan, having heard of good land available near Edna (now Star), decided to accompany the new families to this area. Thus the families of Iwan Pylypow, Mikailo Pullishy, Wasil Fenniak, and Mikailo Melnyk came to settle in Star, each family occupying a quarter of the same section of land.



Bishop Seraphim blesses monument erected in honour of the pioneers

These were the first of the large number of Ukrainian people who settled in central-eastern Alberta. Bringing their faith with them, they were the founding members of the Russo-Greek Catholic Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration. Originally started as a Ukrainian Catholic Church, the parish eventually returned to the Orthodox Church after a lengthy struggle. Today Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church remains active and growing and is one of the parishes of the Lakeland Orthodox Christian Mission.

On August 31, 1991, a Memorial Divine Liturgy commemorating these early pioneers was served at Star. Bishop Seraphim along with Alberta Dean Fr. Stephen Keaschuk, Priestmonk Raphael (Vereshack), Priest-in-charge Fr. Larry Reinheimer, Dn. Andrew Piasta, and Sub-deacons John Panasiuk, Maurice Beecroft and Howard Kowalchuk and a church full of people celebrated the Holy Eucharist together. A special monument in honour of those first four pioneer families had been erected and was blessed. A Panikhida was sung and a meal enjoyed together by the hundreds of people who came for the occasion. Many years! to the parish at Star and to the descendants of those first pioneers. May God keep the memory of these brave, hard-working, devout men and women eternal!

Mission Beginning in Robson, B.C.

On August 25, 1991 Bishop SERAPHIM hallowed ground and consecrated the new mission of Ss. Constantine and Barbara in the hamlet of Robson (Kokanee country), in British Columbia. His Grace served the Divine Liturgy for about fifteen in attendance, most members or former members of St. Herman's in Edmonton. In the heart of Doukhobor country, Kenn and Sharon Hemple have been moved to offer their home for the beginnings of this new mission.

For anyone traveling or visiting in the Robson/Castlegar area, Sharon and Kenn Hemple can be contacted at :

2727 Broadwater Road
Robson, B.C. V0G 1X0
Telephone: 604-365-6131

Youth and Staff Enjoy Camps in Saskatchewan and Alberta

by Pearl Homiak and Matushka Myra Reinheimer

At the end of July, 1991 sixty-three youth and a volunteer staff gathered for a week at the Saskatchewan Orthodox Youth Camp held at Lake Echo near Fort Qu'Appelle. Campers aged 8 to 17 came from Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and North Dakota. This gathering of staff and students was pan-Orthodox, including folk from the Romanian, Antiochian, and OCA dioceses. The campsite, which includes a large dormitory built by volunteer help from surrounding Orthodox parishes, is owned by the Romanian Diocese, OCA.

The goal of the Saskatchewan Orthodox camp is "to present to each camper the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its ramifications, spiritual and social, educational and recreational, individual and communal." Worship, singing, sports, crafts, and even a side trip to Regina's science museum and waterslide made up the busy agenda in 1991. Since its inception, the camp has been directed by Fr. Bernard Funk of St. Vincent of Lerins Church, Saskatoon. Fr. Dennis Pihach of St. Mark the Evangelist Church, Yorkton, is camp administrator. Some parishioners from the many participating churches make up the counselling staff, while others provide instruction in crafts, music, religion and sports. Orthodox women from the area provide and cook the tasty food for hungry campers.



Perry Pawliuk instructs in crafts at the Saskatchewan camp

What did campers think about the camp? "I wish camp wasn't so short"; "this is the best camp I've ever been to!"; "See you next year!"; and "Let's get together for a retreat this winter." As requested, a mid-winter retreat is being planned for January or February in Minot, North Dakota.

From August 5 to 11, St. Herman's, Edmonton and the parishes of the Lakeland Orthodox Mission held a camp at Moose Lake, northeast of Edmonton. Thirty-seven children aged 7 to 13 and eleven volunteer staff enjoyed a week of instruction, worship, singing, crafts and sports. The idea, organisation, and direction of this first summer camp was that of St. Herman's parishioner Brenda Machnee. Fr. Larry Reinheimer gave pastoral oversight.



Yonathan and Jean-Claude on "kitchen detail" at Alberta camp

Staff worked hard together and because of the generous amount of food and financial contributions from the faithful of the parishes, the camp was run under budget, with money to set aside for future camps. Being at the camp was a very positive, rewarding experience for everyone. Spending a week with the young people and watching them learn, worship, work and play together was unforgettable for the staff. What we do for them is what we do for the church of tomorrow. Planning is already taking place for another Alberta Orthodox Youth Camp in 1992, with an increased age limit so that more children can be included.

Archdiocesan Pastoral Notes

Fr. Roman Milanoff has been canonically received by Metropolitan THEODOSIUS from the Patriarch of Bulgaria and is assigned to the Archdiocese of Canada and attached to Christ the Saviour Sobor, Toronto, effective Aug. 8, 1991.

Dn. Peter Isaac was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on August 18, 1991 by Bishop SERAPHIM and is assigned as Priest-in-Charge of St. Peter the Aleut Mission, Calgary.

Hieromonk Raphael (Vereshack) is attached to St. Herman Church, Edmonton, effective Aug. 15, 1991.

Hieromonk Daniel (Baeyens) is released from his Leave of Absence and is attached to Holy Trinity Sobor, Ottawa, effective Aug. 16, 1991.

Monk Simeon Edward (Weare) was ordained by Bishop SERAPHIM to the Holy Diaconate on Sep. 15, 1991 and to the Holy Priesthood on Sep. 22, 1991. (Mount St. Nicholas Skete was blessed by Bishop SERAPHIM on Sep. 13, 1991.)

Fr. John Bartholomew is assigned to Holy Trinity Sobor, Winnipeg, effective Nov. 17, 1991.

Stewardship in Progress: the Experience of St. Herman of Alaska Church, Edmonton

by Rod I. Tkachuk

No one likes catch phrases more than North Americans, so the following words have been highlighted to educate us about the concept of stewardship: *time, talent, and money*. And while concentrating on only those simple words can lead to a very legalistic, almost worldly approach, the three terms must be relevant because the words, especially *money*, bring forth great emotion and debate from individuals, and from inside and outside the Christian community.

Stewardship is not a word that makes the heart race; it is a dry word, giving rise to thoughts of responsibility, duty or obligation. Yet, while it is all of these things, stewardship, if pursued with "patient perseverance" (St. Paul's phrase), brings results that are gloriously life-changing.

It is difficult for us to grapple with how to use our time, talent and money in the abstract. We need a *vision* to focus on. That vision is the building of an *Orthodox Christian community*. Let us take a look at the parish of St. Herman of Alaska in Edmonton, focusing on the concept of stewardship as a real experience with God.

The Necessary Vision

The early members of our parish had this vision. Our priest was unswervingly dedicated to it. And those that came, stayed because of the growing reality of it. So in the early years we did not really do things consciously pursuing the idea of stewardship. We just took steps towards building the community. We did what had to be done.

We bought an acreage. The priest and his family lived in the house. The garage was expanded and was used as the church. The priest worked at a secular job. A few years later we took on our priest fulltime. A couple of years later, we bought a church. After these two major decisions, we took our first large step in stewardship: we decided to stop all fundraising activities and rely on our own giving.

We pressed on; it was like building a town. The Church is our *worship home*, and so we dedicated ourselves to our liturgical life: Divine Liturgy on Sunday, Vespers every Saturday and two Wednesdays a month, celebration of feast days (Vespers the previous evening and Liturgies at 6:30 a.m.!). We prepared binders that held the music and words for the services. We were blessed with a Deacon, readers, sub-Deacons, acolytes; we also began a ministry of door-keepers to greet visitors.

The Church is our *school*. We focused on Adult Education and began working on church-school for our many children. Senior and Junior Youth Groups have been added. We hold regular Synaxes (gatherings to study the faith) at parishioners' homes. We had our first Summer Camp this year. Retreats, seminars and other educational gatherings are held regularly as well. Administrators, teachers, assistants and support workers were always provided by God.

The Church is our *hospital*. Our priest is dedicated to ensuring our full participation in Communion, Confession and Unction. The Church is also our *Fellowship Centre*. After-liturgy coffee-time, regular picnics, banquets, and singles' gatherings are now traditional happenings. Parish Council and the Evangelism Committee, together with other works, like our church publication *Lives in Christ* and our small "bookstore," give opportunity for the use of many talents.

The Necessary Struggle

All of this did not happen in a hurry. It was a struggle. Church School started with just two children. Vespers, with only a handful of people, used to sound like a dirge. *Lives in Christ* is published when we get around to it. Your home library is probably bigger than our bookstore. The angels must frown whenever we discuss our budget. We step on each other's toes regularly. There is so much to do, and it seems to us that we are getting very little done. But now that we are beginning our second decade, we are a mature parish. All the foundation blocks of a full Orthodox Christian community are in place so that the real work can begin.

We are presently part-way through a serious look at the concept of stewardship, in the hope that what we have previously done in a reactive way will now be done more deliberately and thoughtfully. We are preparing a stewardship handbook and adding articles about various aspects of stewardship as these are prepared. We regularly scrutinize our annual pattern of giving and look for ways to encourage regular, habitual weekly giving.

The Necessary Personal Self-scrutiny

A "Townhall Meeting" about stewardship was recently held. One of the things that arose from this discussion was the fact that very few of us spend any serious time budgeting our resources at a personal level. We probably all think that we spend our money on necessities but until we look closely at our personal spending habits, we will have little success in determining what are wants and what are needs; we will have very little information on making choices; and we will very likely remain sluggish in our spending habits if we cannot even take the effort to record the expenditures.

[see next page...]

The Bishop's Letter

My dear brothers and sisters,

Christ is in our midst!

One of the first Scripture passages I ever learned as a child was John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* God's love creates life. His love takes concrete, tangible form. He is insistent and persistent. He follows the creature throughout life and seeks to give life in union with Himself, even to those who insistently and persistently reject His love. So much does He love us that in the midst of our self-deception in willful waywardness He emptied Himself to take on all of our fallenness. He took flesh, becoming a complete human being. He took on all our darkness and separatedness. Then He returned our fallen humanity to its original state by dying and rising again in victory.

The Nativity Feast is the celebration of God's love for us, of His total self-offering in love to give us life. It also celebrates our union with Him which comes as a result of His gift. And it celebrates our own similar self-offering in love as we who have put on Christ in baptism also live daily in Christ. Living daily as Christians means that we carry Christ with us wherever we go and whatever we do, presenting Christ to everyone we meet. It means we bring Our Lord's blessing to others, whoever they are, for all are His children. And it means that we are *measured* by others, and by God Himself, according to our faithfulness to Christ.

The Orthodox Christian is called to a life of **repentance**: turning away from sinful self-service to doing God's will; from willful rebellion to loving offering of obedience to Him; and from "doing my own thing" to being a good steward of His gifts and putting the needs of others before my own. We Orthodox Christians in Canada are beginning to be known by others as a reliable standard of the traditional Christian. When the test is put to us to see if we really are what we say we are, *Orthodox*, will our lives bear the test? Ask yourselves these questions, my sisters and brothers:

Do I really know Jesus Christ in the Orthodox way? Do I properly worship the Holy Trinity in the Orthodox way? Do I have my life ordered in the Orthodox way, with serving Christ as the first priority? Do I care about other people and meet their needs in the Orthodox way? Do I support with the first fruits of all my resources the worship of the Lord and the needs of the poor in the Orthodox way? In short, do I know the Gospel of Christ and live by that Gospel every day of my life in the Orthodox way? At the time when we are finally measured by the Lord Himself, may there be enough of obedience, enough of His Good in me to save me from eternal separation from His life-creating love!

the unworthy
+SERAPHIM
Bishop of Ottawa

This scrutiny is required of our time, as well. Time management is something that the business world knows all about. My wife and I prepared a chart a few years ago that allocated the use of our children's time from after-school until bedtime for the entire week. Family chores, music, sports activities, church activities, favourite TV shows, free time, reading time were all considered and allocated. We were amazed at how smoothly things went: there was plenty of recreational time, but it was savoured much more when it came. Proper stewardship of our time is guaranteed to ensure that we have time to dedicate to the Lord's work.

Stewardship, Ministry, and Reward

Soon our parish will be focusing on the concept of *ministry*, not only for individuals to find their place in the Church but also to determine what matters the parish should undertake as a whole. For we are a family now. We are co-

workers with God. The exciting mystery is that we put in the effort, but the Lord does all the work, and we reap the reward.

As St. Paul says, *he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.* (2 Cor 9:6-8)

We can bet our lives on it! If we analyse ourselves and our relationship with God, individually and collectively, in the context of time, talent and money, and take one step at a time with patient perseverance, then what begins as a struggle becomes habitual and then cheerful. Our lives become full of meaning and purpose. We have goals to focus on, we have transformed attitudes, we have life. As St. Paul goes on to say, "Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift."

Pastor's 25th Anniversary of Ordination Celebrated

by members of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church, Saskatoon

On Nov. 1, 1991, the parish of Holy Resurrection in Saskatoon celebrated with gratitude to God the Silver Jubilee of Ordination of the Very Rev. Fr. Orest Olekshy. Fr. Orest's spiritual roots go back to the earliest days of Orthodox missions in pioneer western Canada and to the first endeavour of Ukrainian settlement. His grandfather Theodore Fuhr was among the first Galician immigrants who left the Austrian empire for Canada with the famed Dr. Vladimir Oleskow in the spring of 1896. A convert from the Uniate church, Fuhr was an ardent believer, a lay reader, and a zealous promoter of Orthodoxy among the new settlers. In 1902, he donated land for the building of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Ascension, and was instrumental in the formation of an amalgamated parish, St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Church, Nisku. In 1902, Bishop Tikhon visited the Fuhrs and the young parish, returning in 1904 to present Theodore Fuhr with a Gramмота for his dedicated service.

Fuhr's daughter Evdokia married Stephen Olekshy of the Calmar area. Together they created a home where reading and discussions were encouraged, the Bible was ever near at hand, and Slavic languages and tradition were learned. Stephen Olekshy was the founder of Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church at Calmar. Within the atmosphere of this devout home, Orest from his early years wanted to be a priest.

Throughout his school years, through high school graduation and a year's work in a bank, the desire for service did not leave him, spurred on by his church youth work (CYMK). In 1959, he enrolled at St. Andrew's College, Winnipeg, graduating in 1963 with a Bachelor of Theology degree, and then supplemented his education with courses from the University of Winnipeg. During these years he met Oksana Onufreychuk, an arts student of considerable operatic talent who shared his deep spiritual concerns. They were married in the fall of 1965. The following year, at Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Winnipeg, Orest was ordained to the diaconate (February) and then to the priesthood (November).

Fr. Orest's first employment as a priest was to travel across Canada on behalf of the newly-formed Youth Mission Department of the Consistory to endorse the aims of CYMK as the chief Orthodox youth organisation in place of the political youth organisations beginning to be adopted by many immigrant parishes of eastern Canada. It was not an easy task and it confirmed to him the needs at hand: first, an Orthodox

youth organisation must have a clear and strong spiritual foundation, not one eroded by nationalistic concerns; second, the language of religious instruction and worship must meet the needs of the participants in order that the Gospel could be communicated properly. Fr. Orest also served the Winnipeg missions up to the Ontario border and was an assistant at Holy Trinity Cathedral, until he was transferred to Willingdon, Alberta where he served nine rural parishes. The Olekshys stayed at Willingdon for three years, during which their daughter, Ilaria, was born.



Fr. Orest, Matushka Oksana, and their daughter Ilaria

In the fall of 1970, the Olekshys moved to Saskatoon on the invitation of the All Saints' Ukrainian Orthodox Church parish council to serve its congregation at Mohyla Institute. Fr. Orest's continued concern for youth and its searchings, particularly of several involved in CYMK leadership, led to home meetings for theological discussion and prayer. A heterogeneous group of eighteen university students, many of them residents of Mohyla Institute, individuals interested in Orthodoxy, and several well-grounded in the faith but seeking deeper fellowship, met in the Olekshy home, amidst resistance from the nationalistic elements within the parish.

In the spring of 1974 Fr. Orest was asked to resign from the parish and his request for an English-language mission for Saskatoon was denied. There was an offer to transfer him to a parish in Brandon, Manitoba, but he replied that he had to be obedient to what God had established. He could not abandon those who had made a positive move toward Orthodoxy. As a result, he was suspended from pastoral duties and the founding Saskatoon group appealed to Bishop Andrej of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America under the Ecumenical Patriarch, and the missionary parish of the Holy Resurrection was received into that jurisdiction. Without

church facilities of any sort, its first services were held in the print-shop of Martin Zip in downtown Saskatoon, in the Olekshy home, and finally at Howard Coad School, until a building could be purchased several years later.

Now in its seventeenth year as a parish, Holy Resurrection is grounded in the faith, guided by principles clearly articulated by Father Orest: the Church must be accessible to those in need; it must be a place where individuals, regardless of class, ethnic background, race, or lack of knowledge, can feel accepted; and once a part, they should be encouraged to learn and grow at their own pace. Faith must precede form, and then the two elements can work together in harmony. A variety of individuals have entered the parish, many with little or no previous religious background, some scarred by drug and alcohol cultures, native children from the local neighbourhood, and those with a solid Christian base seeking the theological and historical roots of Christianity.

In its early years the parish was sustained through ecumenical fellowship, as distance and other factors seemed to prevent a close shepherding by the Diocese. With the ordination of Bishop Nicholas to the UOC in America and his subsequent return to his native church, a search was made for a jurisdictional commitment that would provide the loving authority and supervision needed. In the fall of 1986, Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church was received into the OCA, whose Christian concern, historic aims of missionising the North American continent, and allowance of various languages required for spiritual purposes have worked to upbuild and sustain the parish's life.

Fr. Orest has received the gold cross for his dedicated efforts and has been elevated to the rank of Archpriest. He is currently completing his second term on the Archdiocesan Council and serves as Dean of Saskatchewan. "I am concerned with the brokenness of people caused by sin," he has said. "They must come to health through God the healer, so that the members of Christ's body, the Church, can relate to one another properly." His vision of the future is based on the experience of the last 25 years, a walk at times frightening and lonely, yet one that proves the faithfulness of God, who opened doors of blessing and stability. His chief concern is that Holy Resurrection remain a church open to all, that the spirit of acceptance prevail.

We join together in asking the richest blessings of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit on his beloved servants, the Very Rev. Fr. Orest Olekshy, on Matushka Oksana and their daughter as He leads them forward in ministry. May God grant them health and strength to continue in His service for many years.

A Group Experience of Bible Study

by Deirdre Lavender and others, Holy Trinity Sobor, Winnipeg

Perhaps our Bible study group has continued together for several years because of its balance of continuity and flexibility. Continuity is provided by our facilitator, Constance Kucharczyk, whose theological knowledge provides us with a firm foundation. As well, we try to follow the same format within our time frame of about two hours. We normally meet once a week in winter and approximately once every two weeks in summer. Usually people arrive early to enjoy the hospitality of the home where we meet and share conversation, food and drink. Our group includes seminary graduates, cradle Orthodox, converts from many different backgrounds, and our catechumens. From the beginning we have been Pan-Orthodox and welcoming and open to all. Membership has varied over the years, but there has always been a steady core group.

Our commitment to the Bible study is a living out of our commitment to God and each other as members of an Orthodox Christian community; we therefore start with a prayer to the Holy Spirit and end with a prayer to the Theotokos. Our main topic of study has been the Epistles, especially how they touch our lives individually and corporately. They are an entrance into the life of the Church, giving the background of and showing how the Christian community is established. We also prepare for major feasts by reading some of the hymnography, the Epistles and Gospels, and studying the iconography. We have also been learning about St. Tikhon's mission in North America and his vision of the Church. (It is he who consecrated Holy Trinity Sobor in Winnipeg in 1905.) Connie shares material she receives in connection with the World Council of Churches and the Canadian Council of Churches and reports on meetings she has attended as a member of the Archdiocesan Council. We have discussed such current topics as the Gulf War (the Church's stand on a "just" war and the plight of Orthodox Christians in the Middle East), the Orthodox understanding of death and the funeral service (after a member of the parish died), and the ordination service and the meaning of the priesthood (when a member of the group was to be ordained).

Members value the support and stability that community learning gives to their lives. This has been especially important as conditions in the parish have been difficult and Bible study has become the only Christian education. There is a family atmosphere, warm and accepting, which makes the group a looked-forward-to event each week. Although
[see next page...]

[Bible study...continued from p. 7]

Connie brings in historical background and reference material when it helps us to understand the works we are studying, the primary emphasis is pastoral rather than academic. People are free to contribute what and when they can. The focus is on building up community, building up the Church through enabling each member better to know and understand the faith and thus better to live it and share it with others.

There are difficulties, of course. It is sometimes hard to adjust from social time to studying/learning. Often we do not make the transition easily and start late, wasting time on

irrelevant topics. It is important to be informal but also to maintain discipline. Also, we discovered during the discussions of the Gulf War that more "homework" would keep us better focused on the material. It has also taken us time to realize that varying the place of meetings would keep too large a burden from falling on the same hosts. Yet with God's help, through faith and perseverance we are learning how to be one. There is no set formula. We hope that a brief description of our experience will be helpful to others on the same path.

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*Dedicated to the memory of St. Tikhon,
Patriarch of Moscow (+1925), Archbishop Arseny (Chahovtsov),
and the other missionary labourers of the Orthodox Church in America.*

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