

# HOLY ASCENSION PARISH JUNE 2009 NEWSLETTER



THE HOLY ASCENSION ORTHODOX CHURCH  
is the Washington, DC, parish of the Russian Orthodox Church  
Abroad (ROCA), under the *omophor* (or the conciliar leadership) of  
Metropolitan Agafangel (Pashkovsky), Bishop of Odessa & Taurida.  
The Holy Ascension Parish was organized on Ascension Day, 17  
May 2007.

## BISHOPS & LOCAL CLERGY

✠ Metropolitan Agafangel, Bishop of Odessa & Taurida, and First  
Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad ✠ Andronik,  
Archbishop of Ottawa & North America ✠ Bishop Joseph  
(Hrebinka), Vicar Bishop of Washington ✠ Michael Foster, deacon ✠  
Seraphim Englehardt, subdeacon ✠ John Hinton, subdeacon ✠  
Daniel Olson, reader & choir director ✠

## ADDRESS

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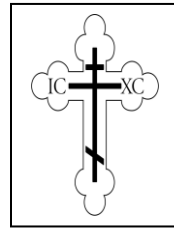
## PART 1. OUR PARISH

The Holy Ascension parish welcomes all Orthodox people to its sacraments and all people with an interest in Christianity and the abiding Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. The immediate Holy Ascension parish background is Russian émigré with many English-speaking converts. Members, visitors, and people in touch online come, however, from all ethnicities. The Church is One.

<http://ruschurchabroad.com/engindex.htm>

<http://ruschurchabroad.com/>

<http://www.holyascension.info/>



## PART 2. EVENTS OF MAY

VISIT OF METROPOLITAN AGAFANGEL, 1 - 10 MAY 2009



<http://www.rocor.us/news.htm>,

<http://ruschurchabroad.com/eng090510.htm>

MEETING OF SYNOD, 22-22 MAY 2009

The Synod of Bishops held a scheduled meeting on these days, along with a meeting of the clergy and laypeople of the Central Russian Administrative District. For the official minutes, see <http://ruschurchabroad.com/engindex.htm>

#### PARISH FEAST, 28 MAY 2009

With the glorious feast day of the Ascension of Our Lord on Thursday, May 28, our parish celebrated its second anniversary. In that time, we have been greatly blessed by our Savior and have much to be grateful for. Most importantly, we cherish the pastorship and guidance of our dear Bishop Joseph, a cleric of the Church Abroad who has remained true to our Faith and Church, and whose wisdom and steadfastness is a comfort to us all. God grant him many years!

We continue to serve an *akathist* every Wednesday at 7:00 PM to pray for God's help in finding new premises for our church. Please join us. In addition, there is a sign-up sheet for families to pray nightly *akathists* in their home. Please sign-up on the bulletin board to select a week.

#### PART 3. JUNE LITURGIES, BY THE CIVIL CALENDAR

All Sunday Liturgies begin at 10:00 AM. A luncheon buffet follows all Sunday liturgies. Volunteers may offer to help with luncheon fare by cooking food at home and by preparation and service at the church.

Currently a regular schedule also designates a family that is responsible for cleaning the church after the services. The duty is for one month at a time. If you wish to volunteer, please see the warden/*starosta*, Mr Gontscharow.

On many Saturday afternoons a BIBLE STUDY GROUP meets at 3:30 PM, chaired by Bishop Joseph. Please check beforehand with the church office, to be sure that the study group will meet on any specific day.

Saturday, June 6, Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, June 7, PENTECOST: THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Hours, Divine Liturgy & Vespers with the reading of the Kneeling Prayer at 9:40 AM.

Saturday, June 13, Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, June 14, First Sunday after Pentecost. Hours & Divine  
Liturgy at 9:40 AM, *All Saints Day*.

Saturday, June 20, Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, June 21, Second Sunday after Pentecost. Hours & Divine  
Liturgy at 9:40 AM. *All Saints Shown Forth in the Land of Russia*.

Saturday, June 27, Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, June 28. Third Sunday after Pentecost. Hours & Divine  
Liturgy at 9:40 AM. *Prophet Amos*

#### PART 4. MEMBERS OF THE PARISH NEWLY GRADUATED BY SECONDARY SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Miss Aleksandra Herbst was graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville VA, on May 17, 2009, with a double major in Foreign Affairs and in Russian & Eastern European Studies and a minor in Russian Language & Literature. Her parents are Ambassador & Mrs John Herbst of Annandale, VA.

Miss Katherine Morgeneegg, 17, will be graduated by George Mason High School, Falls Church, VA, this same June and will enter George Mason University in fall 2009. Miss Morgeneegg has a passion for the written word and served as editor of her school literary magazine, *9 Muses*, in addition to serving with the school newspaper. Katherine plans to major in English, specializing in creative writing. She comes from a family of writers. Her parents are Mr & Mrs Clifford Morgeneegg of Falls Church, VA.

Mr Aleksandr Vandalov will be graduated on June 14. by the James Madison High School, Vienna VA. In fall 2009, he will enter Washington & Lee University, Lexington VA, with an undergraduate US Army Reserved Officer Training Corps scholarship. He will also play college football on the team *W&L Generals*. His parents are Mr & Mrs Seraphim Englehardt of Vienna, VA.

#### PART 6. A FATHER LEV LEBEDEV ARTICLE, WRITTEN BEFORE HIS MYSTERIOUS REPOSE IN 1997

*Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown*  
(Revelation 3:11)

This is the seventh year since the establishment of parishes of ROCOR in Russia. This is not that long, but also not that short, so we may draw some conclusions.

The most important and saddest result of this establishment is that a major exodus of the clergy and Orthodox believers from the so-called "Moscow Patriarchate" into the bosom of ROCOR did not occur, and is not likely to. Most of the ROCOR communities have remained small inseminations, like little islands in a small archipelago in a large ocean alien and even hostile towards them, an environment faithful to the Moscow Patriarchate (from now on, the MP).

Why? Did not Orthodox people in Russia sigh and grieve over many decades when they saw the obvious betrayal and apostasy from God's truth by many of its hierarchs and priests, and by the whole system of the Moscow patriarchate? Did they not see that this system directly and openly serves not Christ, but the antichrist? Did they not say to themselves "red priests", "communists in ryasas" when referring to "key figures" in this system? Weren't they engrossed in reading whatever denunciatory articles ROCOR put out which occasionally managed to get through the "iron curtain" into the USSR?

Those, like the author of this article, who had the chance to live inside the church structure during the Soviet regime know well that it was so. They also sighed, they grieved, were indignant, and agreed with ROCOR! And when the whole "process of democratization" started, one priest after another started turning to the First Therarch and Synod of the Russian Church Abroad with fervent requests to accept them into their canonical status. In May of 1990, the ROCOR Synod of Bishops passed the historic resolution to accept those in Russia wishing to be in the jurisdiction of the Russian Church Abroad. One after another ROCOR parishes sprang up in Moscow, Suzdal, St. Petersburg, Kursk, Voronezh, Tambov, Briansk, Novonikolaevsk, Omsk, Barnaul, Vladivostok, Sempheropol, Sebastopol, Kerch, Feodosia, Kuban, Valaam, etc. Several communities and some individuals came out from the underground Catacomb Church of Russia. How much joy, how much hope there was! What euphoria! It seemed it had started! After the collapse of the evil empire, a

collapse was also starting of the false church structure set up by this empire—this schismatic, anticanonical, renegade, and most heretic "patriarchate."

It should be noted that, apart from the many imaginary transformations in the former Soviet Union, some democratic freedoms were genuine, specifically individual freedom of conscience. Since the 1990's, no one was personally persecuted, or fired from work for his faith, or even for going over to the Church Abroad.

The MP was then frightened in earnest. From its bowels, propaganda directed at ROCOR shot out like lightning, that the Church Abroad was creating schisms by establishing her parallel structures onto the canonical territory of the MP. The official MP assumed that the *masses of simple believers* do not already know that as soon as the pseudo-patriarchate of Metropolitan Sergius (Staragorodsky) went into the criminal agreement of 1927, spiritually fraternizing with the Bolsheviks, a schism was created in the Russian Church. His agreement was rejected by the overwhelming majority of Russian bishops and priests living inside Russia (not abroad!) who did not agree with this union that the unauthorized and uncanonical "Synod" of Sergius had formed to exile, and to firing squads

Not without reason the "Soviet patriarchate," in the words of Metropolitan Sergius in his declaration of 1927, announced to the Bolsheviks that the "joys and success" of their criminal regime "are our (the MP) joys and success, and their sorrows, our sorrows." Now in the 1990's, those former Bolsheviks who overnight became "democrats" are admitting that the "sorrows" of the pseudo-patriarchate are their sorrows. The "patriarchate" and the authorities of the Russian Federation (from now on referred to as RF) quickly became allies. Through the courts and without courts, with the help of the police and special forces (troops used inside the RF) they started to take away by force those churches whose parishioners had gone over to ROCOR. The judges of the RF decided that Church property previously confiscated by the Soviet government should be turned over only to the pseudo-patriarchate as if they were the rightful successor of the imperial Russian Orthodox Church.

The fact, however, is quite the opposite--only the Russian Church Abroad is the lawful successor of the historical Russian Orthodox Church, and likewise of all its properties, in that the Church Abroad preserved unchanged all the teachings, canons, and liturgical ways

which had always been the Russian Church and with the Russian People until 1917, and even until 1927, never deviating into fraternization with antichrist or the heresy of ecumenism!

Incidentally, we may disregard the part concerning church property, for what intrinsic value have physical, man-made structures to do with faith? None! It is not for nothing that the "patriarchate" has grabbed hold of them. In the minds of the large majority of believers these days, the Orthodox faith is inconceivable without "real" churches with "magnificent" services in them. Gradually it is becoming clear, that with rare exceptions, when it comes to the Truth, God's Truth, a real and actual communion with Christ, nobody is interested! To them what is important is appearance but not substance, a self-captivating figment of the Vanity of imagination, and not a spiritual reality; Form, not content.

It is clear that even without any special propaganda, the masses of parishioners of the pseudo-patriarchate and the overwhelming majority of its clergy are not going to leave the "bosom" of the false Church to which they have become accustomed. During the early stages, with only a few exceptions, not the best, but often the worst priests from the MP went over to ROCOR. These were career-men or schemers, or priests with such vices that even the MP might threaten to punish, or they were the spiritually ill, or finally were provocateurs. Very few went over for deeply spiritual, ideological convictions.

On the other hand, a whole series of mistakes was made by the Synod of ROCOR. It was ready to accept anyone who desired to come over without any special investigation, naively assuming that a Russian wearing a *ryasa* and a cross could not possibly, while looking at you directly in the eyes, be saying one thing and thinking something different. Thus archimandrite Valentine (Rusantsov) from Suzdal was accepted with the prospect of *hirotonia* into the bishopric (which subsequently came to pass). Immediately, several worthy and educated monastics who were ready to come over to ROCOR refrained from doing so, when they learned that Valentine had been accepted. He was well known in the MP monastic world, and it was said openly that he was sent intentionally to ROCOR. But at that time, in 1990, it was still not clear why. It became clear later in 1994-95, when he caused a schism by taking away almost half of the communities that had sprung up in Russia and created his own church, independent of anyone but government Special Operations

officers. Also accepted and given special missionary authority was a certain active layman from Barnaul named Ignaty Lapkin, who started to preach his own barbaric mixture of Orthodox, Baptist, and Old Believer notions.

Other curious incidents occurred, and scandal followed scandal. There were cases when some schemers joined ROCOR and then went back to the MP. It became obvious that out in the diaspora our countrymen, including ROCOR hierarchs, in the beginning were not aware of the nightmarish state in which Russian-speaking people of the RF, including the faithful and clergy of the MP live today. Their understanding came later, and now continues to develop. However we can point out, that at the same time, despite all the negative aspects mentioned above, in many ROCOR communities in Russia where truly like-minded people gathered in the name of Christ, church life was genuine, and became healthy and full of grace.

But why were such communities so few in number? Was it MP propaganda? Yes, it was very forceful and persistent. The faithful were told at the beginning that ROCOR was an "anti-Soviet" church, that ROCOR was created by followers of Vlasov, accomplices of fascists, and finally, that ROCOR was an "American faith" (because the Synod headquarters are in the USA). From the ambo, MP bishops threatened to excommunicate any one who associated with people of ROCOR. However, this assault could only frighten half-literate old women who had been Comsomol youths in the 1930s, of whom there were many. And such people were indeed frightened. In whispers they talked to each other about the most terrible sin of those joining ROCOR; they "went against the Soviet regime!" But then soon there was no "Soviet regime"... And where were the lay people and priests who were educated and relatively free in their thinking? It turned out they were part of the patriotic movement, that is, they served the ideological idol called *Motherland*. They sincerely thought that now when everything was falling apart and disintegrating, it was inadmissible to allow a church "schism" on top of that in the Motherland, and that setting up the Church Abroad there was not necessary because they had to try to unite everything and everyone by any means possible, and not to separate--in other words, the "patriots" were not concerned (and are not concerned now!) with questions of Faith or God's Trust, they were concerned with the fate of the Motherland. Practically none of them bothered to understand just what the Motherland is for the Russian people. It

never occurred to them that Great Russia, the rebirth of which they so fretted about, came together and was created from various tribes and lands, not for ethnic or territorial reasons but was based exclusively on the Orthodox faith and the Church. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, for the real Russian, the hierarchy of values was expressed by the formula *Faith, Tsar, and Motherland* or *Orthodoxy, Monarchy, Nationality*. We see that the notion of *Motherland* occupies the last place, but its value lies in its relationship with the first two. Taking it out of its content with its relationship to Faith and Tsar and putting it in the first place when it is not so, or even making it stand alone, turns it into an empty sound, an ideological idol, and we are never to worship idols. But they worship this idol, and how much so--All the way to uniting the cursed red banner with monarchical ones, portraits of Stalin with icons of Christ.

Where did this come from? It came from the werewolf Bolsheviks, starting in 1943, when Stalin tried to impart some characteristics of historical Russia to the Soviet Union, in order to declare this "Union" the successor to the 1000-year-old Russia. Generations of "Soviet" people were brought up on this lie, and they believed it. It is worth mentioning here that the real Orthodox Russian People, whose focus was Holy Russia, have long been destroyed physically. They simply do not exist in Russia any more. Since 1918 a new, artificially bred people called *Soviets*, who are used to living by lies and believing lies, who upon examination turn out to be not a nation but some kind of conglomeration of Russian-speaking inhabitants having no feeling of unity. They have been scattered into fragments and subject to various ideas and spiritual influences, or often by nothing at all. One of the major fragments in this pile is the patriotic faction of the population. But what unites them is not God's Truth, not the faith and the Church, but birth and upbringing in "Our Soviet Motherland, the USSR, membership in the Young Communist League, and the like.

This is the main reason the masses of the "Russian Orthodox Church" in the USSR and now in the RF do not accept the Russian Church Abroad. It is not difficult to see that the basis of the MP is propaganda against ROCOR is the assertion that ROCOR is not our church. We can summarize the general attitude of Russian-speaking believers in today's Russia like this: "Let them that are not our people

be Russians and Orthodox in the Church Abroad. But they are not our people!" They are not like us. Let them stay there as they wish, but we here will remain true to our Mother Church the way She is. Our bishops and priests may be the way they are, but they are ours, just like us all. Those people abroad may be Orthodox, but we do not know them and do not want to!

This is Soviet church patriotism in its pure form. It has come to be and is so strong only because the real Russian, that is the Orthodox, people with a feeling of unity in the Church, in the Truth, does not exist any more.

However, even such hard-core Soviet patriots are now few compared to the majority of people in the RF for whom the only thing sacred are sausages.

The MP itself is in a sad state of affairs. After 1990-91, even with full freedom, the Russian-speaking people did not turn to the Church in droves as was expected! Of course there was a certain influx of people, but nothing that could in any way be called widespread. The most the MP can count on is 20 to 30 million believers out of all so-called Russians.

This is still immeasurable greater than the number of believers in Russia belonging to ROCOR. However, it is not a matter of quantity. The fact is, the minute number of people in the small ROCOR communities deprived of all backing and means make up the real Church of Christ, His mystical Body, of which He Himself is the head! And in our days, during the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996, a second wave of people quietly joined the real Church. These were spiritually sober, normal people who joined ROCOR with deep convictions. Even the tacit existence of such a Church is a testimony to the Truth and a denunciation of falsehood, including the falsehood of the Moscow pseudo-patriarchate. And this is extremely undesirable for the RF government and the "secret world agenda." The latter was only tolerating the Russian Church Abroad until recently inasmuch as she seemed to be on the frontlines against communism. But now, when at the bidding of the West, communism in Russia obediently relinquished its place as the "guiding and inspiring power" of society, there was no more need for ROCOR abroad or in Russia. Under no circumstances could such a Church be allowed to grow, become strong, and draw in the "masses." To keep the appearance of democracy, they could not simply ban the Russian Church Abroad. The RF authorities still did register ROCOR

communities from time to time, giving them "legal status", though not without putting many obstacles and bureaucratic red tape in their way. But what could they do to keep the "damage" on Russian soil to the real Russian Church at a minimum? Split her up! From the inside. Break up and keep breaking up, preferably grind her to powder! Such was the case with the Suzdal split, which was rigged beforehand. And now recently, a new split is clearly being planned among the Russians in the diaspora with regards to their relationship to the MP. A whole group of laymen and priests, even some ROCOR bishops who have lost all spiritual acumen (which maybe they never had in the first place) have begun to lean towards rapprochement and even outright unification with the MP. For these people, the idol of *Motherland* has screened them off from our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be foolish for the appropriate agencies of the West and of Russia now working together not to take advantage of the situation...It is very possible that we will experience yet another schism.

However, while all these forces of evil from the world and the *Motherland* are at work, they are doing a highly useful thing, unbeknownst to them: they act like garden shears with which our Heavenly Father, in the words of our Savior, like a Gardener prunes away from the vine of Christ all the branches which do not produce fruit.

On the vine that is in Christ, only the "branches" bearing fruit remain. Despite everything, in Russia such branches have become firmly established, have sprouted, and will remain until the Second Glorious Coming of Christ. That they will be very few at that time, our Lord Himself foretold saying, *when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?* (Luke 18:8).

Everything testifies to the fact that our ROCOR communities in Russia will not be the Church of the majority of Russians, will not bring about the revival of Orthodoxy. May God grant that they "hold fast what they have," that no one tempt them. Today it is clear that in many ways these communities resemble the communities in the early apostolic times of Christianity. Only in a few places have they managed to actually build small churches. In most of the communities, services take place in home-churches (in apartments) or buildings turned into churches (sheds and garages). This is depressing to some, but it need not be! We should remember that the first New Testament Liturgy served by Christ Himself took place at

the mystical supper in a private home, in an upper chamber made ready, and after Him the apostles "broke bread in their homes." that is, they performed the Eucharist in home environments.

And what was the mood and worldview of the Apostles and their followers? One has only to read what Apostle Paul writes in his epistles. He assumed that the Second Coming would occur in this lifetime (*we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord* (First Thessalonians 4:15). All the Christians of his time pretty much thought likewise--To preserve the faith, To be ready to suffer for Christ, and To await His Second Coming. When that will occur, we do not know, and it is not for us to try to find out, but it is clearly not far off, *near, at the very gates* (Mark 13:29). Such was the feeling! There was no thought to "revive" all humanity or even just the Roman Empire! No one can explain how out of these relatively small communities, islands of truth, what we call Christian civilization" arose and continued in the world for another 2,000 years, despite all the adverse circumstances and constant slander. This was only because of God's Providence, God's power.

And so we, members of the communities of ROCOR in Russia, are spread out like small islands in an ocean of general insanity, unbelief, and heterodoxy. It is possible that we are the last ones... And if, because of us something happens and grows, this would not be our doing, but God's doing and His miracle. We ought to then *hold fast what we have* (Revelation 3:11) and be ready for anything because of our selfless pure love for Lord Jesus Christ.

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