

Our Parish History

In Celebration of the
Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of
Saint Xenia Orthodox Church
and Parish Altar Feast of
the Canonization
St. Xenia of St. Petersburg

Hierarchical Services of
All-Night Vigil and Divine Liturgy
Officiated by
The Most Reverend Metropolitan Laurus,
First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad
23rd & 24th of September 2006



Troparion to St. Xenia, in the Fourth Tone

Having renounced the vanity of the earthly world, /

Thou didst take up the cross of a homeless life of
wandering;/
Thou didst not fear grief, privation, nor the mockery
of men,/
And didst know the love of Christ./
Now taking sweet delight of this love in heaven,/
O Xenia, the blessed and divinely wise,//
Pray for the salvation of our souls.

A Letter from Our Pastor

The parish of St. Xenia Orthodox Church is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. This is a true milestone for a new parish, particularly one dedicated to serving the needs of such a diverse group of Orthodox Christians. From its inception, the mission of the parish has been to provide traditional Orthodox services and instruction in the English language native to North America. The parish has grown over these ten years by embracing persons of many nationalities, and has prospered by maintaining the focus on the ministry to the unchurched of our native land.

It is perhaps the greatest struggle of parishes in this country to remain true to Orthodox Tradition. Being free to worship openly and without encumbrance is a wonderful thing, but it carries with it the temptation to use this freedom both individually and collectively to massage the beliefs, laws and mores of the Church to more comfortably fit in the modern milieu. St. Xenia's parish continues to this day to struggle against modernism in these areas, and to hold fast to the solid foundation laid by our Lord Jesus Christ, his holy apostles, St. Xenia herself and the founders and benefactors of this holy temple.

The casual observer at our Sunday and Festal Divine Liturgies can see that the parish is indeed growing and strengthening. We consistently have new individuals and families coming to worship with us, some able to make the commitment to contribute as members. We have had numerous baptisms of both adults coming to the saving confines of the Church from years of struggle with heterodoxy or non-belief, and new babies being born into our pious young families. What a joy for any Christian to behold!

It was truly by the Grace of God and the prayers of St. Xenia that this parish was able to acquire this land and build the temple and adjacent hall. The struggles, persistence and generosity of the founders and benefactors were nothing short of extraordinary. I felt truly blessed when called to serve the parish four years ago. With a parish council of highly able and motivated people, and the constant generosity of the parish membership and friends, we have sought to continue in the manner of the founders and build upon what they began. Our cemetery has been greatly expanded and beautified with new paving and careful landscaping.

Our parking lot has been expanded. Our holy temple has been adorned with a beautiful mosaic of St. Xenia at the entrance, expertly executed iconographic frescos both in the altar and above the iconostasis, and numerous new icons, vestments and festal coverings. And now we are making strides towards finishing off our basement space to be both proper storage and multi-use space for classes and meetings. All of this is a testimony to the outpouring of God's Grace that has inspired and motivated our members and friends to give freely and lovingly as a way of offering help to the helpless, and beauty and truth to those who will worship with us.

It is our collective prayer that this first ten years is only the beginning of many decades of loving prayer and service yet to come. We especially pray that as we grow older we will live to see our children and our children's children follow this Royal Path with and after us, and that the Holy Gospel will be preached to all those around us in an Orthodox manner. We pray that our humble, individual contributions will be greatly magnified in the collective endeavors of the whole parish, and that we will always remember the Savior's commandment to "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (Jn. 13:34)."

- Fr. Michael Crowley



Pascha 2005: Fr. Michael giving a Pascha Egg to Nicholas Lang. Photo courtesy of Nicholas Kronauer.

The History of St. Xenia Parish

In the late 1980's, a small group of parishioners from Holy Epiphany Russian Orthodox Church in Roslindale, along with parishioners from other churches, under the guidance of Holy Epiphany's rector, Fr. Roman Lukianov, received an

Episcopal blessing to form a new mission parish. Their goal was to provide for its members and to offer to others, traditional Orthodox Christianity in the English language (Holy Epiphany's services are in Slavonic).

The group first gathered to pray in Ipswich, under the direction of Fr. Laurence Girard, in the house chapel of Subdeacon Vladislav Kasarda. With Fr. Laurence's decision to move to Clearwater, Florida, Fr. Roman sent Fr. Nicholas Bargoot (then assistant pastor at Holy Epiphany) to serve at the house chapel. There, after each liturgy, the small group prayed to St. Xenia of St. Petersburg (who helped build the Church in the Smolensk Cemetery during her life) that she would ask God to bless their effort and establish them in a church. The parish to this day continues to serve molebins to St. Xenia.

After a time, a name was needed for the new mission, and over 30 were proposed. Bishop Hilarion instructed the pastor to write each of the names on a separate piece of paper and to have the youngest parish member draw three names before Divine Liturgy. The names were placed on a tray on the altar. After Divine Liturgy, and a special service of supplication to our Lord, the final name was drawn from these three by the oldest member of the parish. When the name was drawn, everyone was amazed to see that it was St. Xenia. Since St. Xenia Mission was serving parishioners from southern New Hampshire to Worcester, Massachusetts, Fr. Nicholas and Matushka decided to move from their home in Rhode Island to a more central location in the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts, and then set about searching for a place to hold services. Cardinal Bernard Law kindly gave permission to Msgr. Michael Teirney, the pastor of the local Roman Catholic parish, for Fr. Nicholas to hold weekend services in the school hall of the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Bradford. The first service was held in August, 1989.

In order to advance the development of the mission and allow for weekday services, the still very small parish began to search for some space to rent, so that a more permanent chapel could be set up and parish life could be expanded. The search was daunting because the parish's budget was inadequate to rent the amount of space it really needed. Finally, the manager of one building, when learning of the circumstances of the mission, decided to help, and rented it a very adequate space for just the amount that the parish could afford. In November of that same year (1989), St. Xenia Mission moved to a storefront chapel at 55 Wingate Street in Haverhill.

Just two months after moving into the storefront and setting up the chapel, the sprinkler in the building four floors above burst, pouring thousands of gallons of water into the building. The water flowed through each level, including the church's. The chapel was destroyed; the altar cloths, antimins and many other furnishings were contaminated and ruined, and fallen ceiling tiles floated in puddles on the floor. The chapel was uninhabitable, and it was ten days before The Nativity of Our Lord.

The building manager – who was also a builder – estimated we needed eight weeks of cleanup. Then he learned that the Julian Calendar Christmas was coming, and the pastor was committed to restoring the chapel by the Feast. He promised to do all he could to help meet this commitment. Through the sometimes around-the-clock work of his crew and the tremendous efforts of the parish, the chapel was operational before Christmas.

The renovations that followed allowed the parish to repartition its space, so that the resulting chapel was far better than the original.

The parish's life continued to develop, with adult catechism classes, a well rounded liturgical schedule and the hosting of a very well attended Liturgical Choir Conference in October, 1990, in Rye, New Hampshire (at which then-archbishop Laurus officiated at the services), and the ordination of our very dedicated parishioner, Nicholas Carey, as Subdeacon.

A few years later the building on Wingate Street became the property of the FDIC, as were many buildings at that time. Since the church served 25 households by this point, the time had come after 7 years to move on to the next phase of the parish's development.

A Permanent Home

By this time, some members of the mission had previously belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist, which had been located in the neighboring city of Lawrence. This parish (which disbanded around 1970) had owned a cemetery in Methuen, which had been ceded, along with the cemetery's perpetual care fund, to the town of Methuen by the remaining parishioners a few years after the closing of St. John's. At the suggestion of some of the former members of St. John's Church, and the agreement of the parish, the status and history of the property was investigated. The father of one of our parishioners, Lilly Dombrowski, had been a founder of St. John's Church. Mrs. Dombrowski had stored a copy of the charter of the parish and other key documents that verified that the Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery and the church were always in one or another part of the Russian Church. After assembling all of these, and preparing a petition to the Town Council, the parish received a blessing from Bishop Hilarion to move forward to acquire the land. Not only did the parish encounter no resistance whatsoever from the town in the restoration of the property to the Church, the Town of Methuen even returned the perpetual care fund that they had received with the cemetery.

After many failed attempts to develop a viable set of building plans, the pastor enlisted Mr. Alexei Panov, a retired builder, and Fr. Roman Lukianov, who together had built Holy Epiphany Church, for advice in coming up with a design the parish could afford. The parish also received great help from Fr. Valery

Lukianov, a structural engineer, who had contributed to the planning of many churches. In a short time, the pastor's sketches were improved and converted into plans for the church that stands today for a nominal cost by a friend of Mr. Panov's, Mr. Norm Homsey (who had also been the architect of the St. John of Damascus Church built in Boston). The process of finding a builder was undertaken in the conventional way, but the final choice was not.

Lily Dombrowski had a friend who was an elderly lady and had not attended services since the closing of St. John the Baptist Parish. At Mrs. Dombrowski's encouragement, the lady, Mrs. Anna Garabedian, requested confession and communion from St. Xenia's Church. Her son, Charles, was a builder, and she suggested to Fr. Nicholas that the parish contact him for the construction of the new church building. However by then, the parish had already committed to a builder and so no contact was made.

Mrs. Garabedian reposed a little later, and was buried from St. Xenia Church. Her son Charles was touched so much by the funeral service, he expressed a desire to build, or at least help build, the new church building. The parish had already begun planning with a builder from Dracut, so Mr. Garabedian offered to at least do the excavation and build the basement free of charge. Then the builder with whom the parish was working suddenly became completely unable to build the church as planned. Mr. Garabedian again expressed his willingness to take over the project and the parish was now free to accept his help.

After the prescribed service for the founding of a church, construction began in June, 1995. Mr. Garabedian worked tirelessly on the construction, and never took any payment for his work. The parish bought the materials and paid subcontractors when they were needed and Mr. Garabedian took on as much as possible himself.



"Blessing of the Groundbreaking" for the new St. Xenia Orthodox Church, Sept., 1992. From left to right: Father Nicholas Bargoot, (at present) Bishop Gabriel, then Bishop (at present Archbishop) Hilarion, Protodeacon Andre Papkov and Father Roman.

At first progress was hampered by repeated vandalism to the machinery, making it impossible to even begin the foundation. After a particularly bad episode of damage to Mr. Garabedian's equipment, the parish went to the cemetery after Liturgy one Sunday and served a prayer service to St. Xenia on the site. After the service, a small paper icon of St. Xenia was placed on each piece of equipment. Glory be to God, there were no further episodes of vandalism.

After the excavation, Bishop Hilarion came for the service of the laying of the cornerstone, and brought relics of the Holy Monk Martyrs of the St. Theodosius Monastery in Palestine, which were sealed in a gold box under the first stone.

Unfortunately, Subdeacon Nicholas Carey, who spent so much time at the construction site, and was so looking forward to the new church building, didn't live to see it finished. On August 11 1995, while undergoing surgery for cancer, he suffered two massive heart attacks and reposed in the Lord.



Charles Garabedian (center), Subdeacon Nicholas Carey (right), Altar Server John Sarantakis (far left) and Altar Server David Stentiford (left) at the groundbreaking services.

The church was half completed after a few months, and the plan was to stop construction, raise the rest of the funds needed to complete the building and then finish it by the next year. Mr. Garabedian said "who knows what I will be doing next year" and he advised Fr. Nicholas to get financing to finish the church in the first year.

Once the rest of the funding was in place, Mr. Garabedian finished construction, less than one year after the service for the laying of the cornerstone. We moved into our new parish building in May of 1996.



Raising of the Church Walls.



July 1995



October 1995

The first service in the new building was actually performed before it was completed, with the plasterers taking a break so that it could be held. It was a service of supplication before the Myrrh Streaming Iveron icon of the Mother of God, which was visiting the area at the time. During the service the myrrh flowed so much that it flowed out of the icon's case onto the table where it had been placed. A friend of Mr. Garabedian's, Mr. Larry Vaughn (who was also helping with the construction), came late to this service, after all the cotton with myrrh had been distributed and the icon moved back into the car. Mr. Vaughn told Fr. Nicholas that the son of a friend of his had been in a terrible auto accident, was in intensive care, and not expected to live. Mr. Vaughn wanted to bring myrrh from the icon to the mother of the boy. One piece of cotton with myrrh and a picture of the icon were found in the church, and Mr. Vaughn took these to the boy's mother.

A few days later, Mr. Vaughn stopped by the church site to tell Fr. Nicholas that the mother had anointed her son with the myrrh, and as she did so, the amount of myrrh on the cotton increased continually soaking her hands, so that she was able to anoint his whole body. The next day, to the amazement of the physicians, the boy's condition improved, and was continuing to do so. Many weeks later Mr. Vaughn reported that the boy was up and about, receiving physical therapy and still steadily improving.

Only a few months after completing the church, on August 21, 1996, Mr. Charles Paul Garabedian died from a heart attack while playing golf. Mr. Garabedian was a remarkably intelligent man of exceptional character. He was justifiably respected by all that knew and worked with him. In the years since moving into the building, the parish has concentrated on beautifying the church and cemetery grounds, developing the choir and Sunday School, hosting a conference on establishing Orthodox Parochial Schools, undertaking various programs of

outreach and evangelism, and in general, establishing good order in its parish life.

In addition to the various documents that Mrs. Dombrowski had saved, there was also one other important item. When the Church of St. John the Baptist was being torn down, Mrs. Dombrowski visited the site and rescued, from the pile of rubble, the cross that her father had made and put on top of the Church. St. Xenia Church restored that cross, Andrew Bargoot gilded it, and it now sits on top of the new church.



Lilly Dombrowski flanked by her two sisters: Alice Taylor (left) and Mary Bronchuk (right).

Through the generous support of some of the Greek parishes in the area, and the pastor's home parish of St. John of Damascus, the parish also acquired many old and even antique furnishings, and the wooden iconostas, which gives a valuable sense of continuity with the past, and connection with the present. The iconostas icons as well as the cross behind the altar were painted by Dmitry Skolnik, while the Royal Doors were the work of Rev. Archdeacon Thomas Reske of Holy Epiphany. The frescos in the dome were the work of the then Priestmonk Gregory of Colorado, who was in the ROCOR at the time.

History in Conclusion

In August 2002, the moving of our long time pastor, Fr. Nicholas Bargoot, to a new ministry in Florida saddened our parish greatly. We are truly grateful to Fr. Nicholas for all his tireless efforts and much love and dedication throughout the life of the parish, from inception to building and establishing the church we enjoy today. Many individuals gave their time, money and prayers over the years and although we cannot acknowledge every name in this document, we appreciate you and may God bless you always for your love and care for St. Xenia Parish.

Once again, our prayers to St. Xenia were heard and Bishop Gabriel of Manhattan appointed Fr. Michael Crowley as our new pastor. Fr. Michael had a small mission parish in South Portland, Maine for a number of years. We are thankful to Father Michael, Matushka Nancy and their children for coming to our parish with much devotion and enthusiasm.

Our new pastor was almost immediately called upon to respond to an emergency. Our parish church and cemetery were senselessly vandalized by a group of young men on September 11th 2002. The vandals were apprehended soon afterwards and the church, hall and cemetery were restored with only some minor repairs pending. Methuen Monument responded immediately and worked 3 days and nights repositioning the uprooted monuments; they generously worked at no charge to us. Fr. Michael blessed the church and cemetery with holy water and prayers to cleanse them spiritually after their defilement. Despite it being a painful ordeal, thankfully, peace in our parish was restored.

History of the Church Choir

The St. Xenia Choir has improved tremendously from its humble beginnings at the storefront church in Haverhill. David James was the first choir director, and he struggled with the few members we had, most of whom had no musical training. We had talented singers join for a time, but they always moved on. It took a lot of determination to continue with the choir in the early days!

David was fortunate to meet Maelrubha Donley through the Internet in 1994. Maelrubha then began attending St. Xenia's in Haverhill, and within 3 weeks he was made the choir director. Maelrubha was a music conservatory graduate, specializing in Russian music, with over 25 years of experience as a chorister and director. David was more than grateful that the extremely qualified and gifted Maelrubha was willing to take over the choir. (Besides acting as choir director, David also worked tirelessly for years doing fundraising for our church. Father David was ordained a Deacon in February, 1999).

Maelrubha implemented regular, weekly choir rehearsals, and taught the choir the tones and many pieces of new music. He also ran the workshop sessions of a children's choir workshop put together by Patricia Crowley and Alex Klar in April, 2003, which was attended by children from parishes all over New England.

Under Maelrubha the choir grew considerably and matured significantly. Maelrubha was tonsured a Reader in September, 1997.

Robert Stauffer, our very dedicated Canonist, joined our parish and choir in 1999. Under Maelrubha's tutelage Robert learned the church rubrics, and now puts together all the services for us, is assistant choir director, and has taken over responsibility for Saturday evening Vigil services. Robert was tonsured a Reader in September, 2005.

Michael Lang, who has been our director since 2003, is very talented and very experienced. He was a choir director at his church (The Meeting of the Lord Russian Orthodox Church in Stratford, Connecticut) while still in high school! Michael is diligently teaching us the different Russian hymns in various liturgical styles of music all translated into English. He continually introduces new music commensurate with the abilities of the choir, always challenging us with each new hymn. Michael's patient teaching and the arrival of several truly talented voices have resulted in a much more experienced choir with greater depth.

The Sisterhood of the Myrrhbearers

St. Xenia Church established the Sisterhood of the Myrrhbearers soon after Fr. Michael's arrival in 2002. Prior to that, committees were formed to take on various projects, such as fundraising, preparation for feast days, cleaning, etc. The Sisterhood of the Myrrhbearers' primary focus has been charity outreach on local, national and international levels. We have had fundraising efforts including yard sales and wrapping paper sales. The Sisterhood is also one of the sponsors of an annual social event, "Lilac Nights". In addition, we help with the cleaning and beautification of the Church, preparation for feast days and support of the church school program.

Religious Instruction

St. Xenia Church has always had religious classes for children, young adults and adults. In fact it is worthy to note that in 1998, Father Nicholas established a Christian Orthodox school, hiring an elementary school teacher and music teacher. Classes with a full curriculum were taught in the church hall from September 1998 through June 1999. Due to insufficient enrollment/tuition the school unfortunately had to close after one year of classes.

In 2005 and 2006, several learned lectures were given on religious historical topics. Currently, adult classes are offered biweekly, alternating between Bible Study and Catechetical Classes in the Principles of Orthodoxy. Sunday School classes are offered at three levels: primary, intermediate and advanced (for high school and college age).

Church Statistics:

The Parish Council Secretarial records for our parish for the 9/1/2005-9/1/2006 year shows the following:

- 48 households are represented by our parishioners
- 82 voting members are listed.

Of our 82 members (these are adults over 21) 58 are men and women married and both Orthodox. The remaining 24 individuals are married or single as follows: 2 married to an Orthodox who is a nonmember, 9 married to a non-Orthodox (Christian or non-Christian), 4 single/widowed elders, 11 single people. There are 59 'children' in our parish ranging in age from newborn to college age.

May Their Memory Be Eternal

Nadejda Gretschnikow
Francis McLellan: August 1995
Subdeacon Nicholas Carey: August 1995
Anne Garabedian: February 1995
Nicholas Kniaziuk: February 1996
Stephen Demchok: July 2000
Inna Blinow: February 2001
Natalie Holt: December 2002
Mary Bronchuk: August 2002
Stephan Bronchuk: January 2003
Marjana Kondit: December 2003
Alexandra Brasol: August 2004
Barton Taylor: July 2005
Svetlana Chirinskiev: 2005
Stephen Hayes: July 2006

*This list is according to our church records to date, please forgive any inadvertent discrepancy or omission.