

Welcome

Confirmands & Visitors
from
First Church of Christ
(Congregational)
Mansfield, Connecticut

April 29, 2012
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Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearing
Women & Righteous Nicodemus

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
Willimantic, Connecticut

Welcome:

We extend a warm welcome to the confirmands, along with their mentors and families from The First Church of Christ in Mansfield, CT, to Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. It is a joy and a blessing to have you with us for Divine Liturgy this morning. We pray you will be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that being with us you will be assisted in your spiritual journey.

A Brief History of Orthodox Christianity:

In the years after Christ's Resurrection, the apostle and missionaries traveled through the known world. They spread the Gospel, the Good News of life eternal and salvation, through their proclamation of our Lord's saving death and resurrection. As the Good News spread, five major locations were established as centers for the Christian faith: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. These five patriarchal centers formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other for centuries.

For over 1000 years there was just one church. In the 11th century a tragic split occurred between the Orthodox East and the Latin West. The 'Great Schism' in the year 1054, sadly still exists to this day. The role of the Papacy, the procession of the Holy Spirit (*'filioque'*), and the Doctrine of Original Sin were the major areas of disagreement. The Roman patriarchate became the center of the Western church until the Protestant Reformation 500 years later. The Eastern patriarchates stayed in communion with one another and are known as Christians who maintain the Orthodox faith.

Many Orthodox Churches were established in the early 20th century by immigrants who came to America to seek a better life. Many worked in steel mills, factories, and coal mines. The churches were then formed along ethnic lines, such as Greek, Russian, Serbian, or Syrian. These churches have a theological and moral unity, although drawbacks still exist. Unfortunately, for the past 95 years, since the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Orthodox churches in America remain divided among ethnic lines. The hope is that one day there will be a unified Orthodox Church in America comprised on Orthodox Christian of all denominations. Orthodox Christians of all denominations throughout the world hold unanimously to the fundamental Christian dogmas and moral standards taught by the apostles and handed down by the successors, the bishops, throughout the centuries.

Here at Holy Trinity we are heirs of this heritage and missionary efforts which began in Alaska in 1794. It was at that time that missionaries sent by the Orthodox Church of Russia crossed the Pacific Ocean and arrived to the

Alaska peninsula. Orthodox Christianity had arrived in America. These missionaries translated the scriptures into the tongues of the Native Alaska and began spreading the faith across America. The first Orthodox Church in the lower 48 states was in Ft Ross, CA. The church continued to make its way east across the United States. Many Orthodox Churches in Connecticut were established between the period of 1902-1920. The most venerated of these Russian missionaries sent from the Valaam Monastery was Fr Herman, a simple priest-monk who spent his life in prayer, who was canonized a saint in August, 1970. Many Orthodox Churches throughout North America bear his name, Saint Herman of Alaska.

For more than 175 years the Orthodox Church in America was under the governance of Moscow. But in April, 1970, the Orthodox Church of Russia granted the decree of self-government (autocephaly) to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), making it the 15th independent and self-governing autocephalous Orthodox church in the world.

Until approximately 35 years ago, most ethnic churches worshipped in their native tongue (Greek, Serbian, Russian). Church Slavonic was used almost exclusively here at Holy Trinity. With many church members now comprised of third and fourth generations of believers, in addition to a large number of converts to the Orthodox faith, nearly every OCA church serves in English, the language of the people in America. Although the Orthodox Church is the oldest church in Christendom, it is still new to many people in North America.

Worship:

The center of the life of an Orthodox Christian is centered on worship. Worship is the common action of all Christians. By worshipping God, we move into closer communion with him. Orthodox churches still use forms of worship that were practiced in the first century. The Liturgy served this morning is attributed to St John Chrysostom, a powerful 4th century bishop of Constantinople. The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom reached its final form in the 6th century, so that which is celebrated today in Orthodox Churches throughout the world, is an unbroken link through the past approximately 1400 years. The Divine Liturgy is considered to be ‘corporate (or community) prayer’, instead of ‘private prayer’, the prayer each Christian person prays when by themselves.

The Divine Liturgy has as its structure the Old Testament rule of prayer and worship. As in Old Testament times, our worship includes prayer, hymns, sacred readings, a Word (Homily) and sacrifice. Whereas animals were the

sacrificial offering prior to Christ, it is the Lord's sacrifice which Orthodox participate in. The Divine Liturgy is a Eucharistic service; there is Holy Communion. The Sacrament is reserved for those Orthodox Christian who have prepared themselves to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord through repentance, prayer, fasting, and living a just and moral life.

Another feature of Orthodox Liturgy is the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed. It expresses our belief in the Holy Trinity. The Creed is the Orthodox Christian's confession of faith. It is the only personal prayer in the Liturgy. It begins with "I believe ..." No one can believe for us. The major work on the Nicean Creed was formulated during the first Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, and revised during the Second Council in Constantinople in 381.

Iconostas:

You will notice a large screen which separates the altar from what is known as the nave. In the Orthodox tradition, this is known as the iconostasis. In Eastern Christianity an iconostasis is a wall of icons and religious paintings, separating the nave from the sanctuary. Iconostasis also refers to a portable icon stand that can be placed anywhere within a church.

Our icons were commissioned by +Mr George Goutsev of Sofia, Bulgaria in 2008. Sadly, Mr Goutsev died on May 25, 2011. His work is being continued by his first wife, Cveta Marinova whose work looks nearly identical to +George's. The icons on our iconostasis, from l-r, are St Innocent, Apostle to America; St Nectarios of Aegina, the patron saint of those who suffer from cancer; St Romanos the Melodist who wrote over 800 hymns the church uses during a yearly liturgical cycle, the Theotokos, the Mother of God; Our Lord, Jesus Christ; St Stephen the church's first martyr and deacon; St John the Forerunner and Baptizer of our Lord, and St Herman of Alaska, the first canonized saint of the new Orthodox Church in America.

The Origins of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church:

The seeds of Holy Trinity were first planted on August 16, 1916. A parcel of land which sits at the intersection of Valley Street and Mansfield Avenue, was purchased in November, 1948. Soon thereafter a foundation was poured; yet because of financial limitations, a decade passed before the church was entirely constructed and consecrated. It has been reported that the city of Willimantic strongly urged the Holy Trinity community to finally build the church, or else ...

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