

The History of Holy Trinity Parish

Springfield, Vermont

The beginning of Holy Trinity Parish is probably quite similar to the beginnings of many Orthodox parishes in this country. During the early 1890's, Orthodox Christians from Russia began settling in Springfield. Springfield has always been an industrial town and the employment opportunities were good. Before long the Orthodox community grew and a real need for the Church developed.

On October 5, 1905, Archpriest Alexander Hotovitsky celebrated the first Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church in Springfield, Vermont. He came from the New York Cathedral once a month to serve Liturgy in various private homes. Eventually, Alexander Lovell donated the use of two rooms in his home on Valley Street. One room was converted to function as a chapel. The other served as a meeting room. Both a Brotherhood and a Sisterhood were formed and the parish began to grow. The first officers of the Brotherhood were: Damian Kozak, President; Kuzma Gorbachov, Secretary; Michael Koleda, Vice-President; Joseph Kozak, Assistant Secretary; Afanas Koleda, Treasurer; Basil Koms, Semen Ziatnisky, Stefan Sudnikovich, Auditors; Dometi Kaminsky, Ignaty Rybchik, Overseers of the Sick; Alexander Lovell, Sargent.

On November 10, 1906, the Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Brotherhood purchased a piece of land adjacent to Mr. Lovell's home from Nathan S., Wells H. and Laura A. Proctor for \$1,500. This was acquired in anticipation of the construction of a church. But three years later the decision was made to purchase the present church building on Park Street from Norman H. and Lilla Green for \$4,500. On June 24, 1909, this small Orthodox community finally had their first church. Rev. V. V. Alexandrof, pastor of the Three Saints Parish in Ansonia, Connecticut, helped to make the arrangements for this purchase and Bishop Alexander Nemolovsky arrived to dedicate the church. Rev. George Varlashkin was a signatory on the deed and it seems that he served as the first permanent priest. Due to a lack of national and local records the dates are not certain, but at some point his nephew replaced him. Fr. Alexander Varlashkin had recently graduated from the American Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Valley Street property was subsequently sold on November 9, 1909 to Mr. Lovell.

Work began immediately to convert the house into a living Orthodox Church and on October 19, 1911 the major work was completed with the dedication of the steeple and the bell. A Divine Liturgy was celebrated at 5:00 a.m. for the commemoration. Rev. John P. Kedrovsky delivered the presentation address from Watervliet, New York. Joseph E. Morse built the steeple, which rises 69 feet above the church foundation. Mr. Morse was a local lumber contractor who owned a lumberyard where the Continental Telephone Company is presently located.

At this time, a comprehensive school program was organized for the children of the parish. The children met for two hours after school five days a week and every morning during the summer vacation. In addition to learning Russian and Church Slavonic, the children were required to memorize several prayers and to learn about the theology of their Church.

Most of their studying was done from a book entitled God's Law. The school continued in this form for approximately 20 years.

The parish had gotten off to a good start but the flu epidemic, which struck Springfield in 1918, created an unexpected setback. Approximately 10% of the parishioners, most between the ages of 25 and 35, died and the loss was dearly felt.

On the national level, Bishop Evdokim Mischersky was assigned as head of the North American Archdiocese on August 11, 1914. At the same time he was elevated to the rank of archbishop. He replaced Archbishop Platon who had been transferred back to Russia. Archbishop Evdokim arrived in New York on May 27, 1915 and immediately set about reorganizing church life. One of his first changes was the transfer of the Brooklyn, New York orphanage to the newly established Holy Virgin Protection Convent in Springfield. He placed it under the care of Mother Paulina (A women's college was then opened in the former orphanage building.) He purchased the property and house adjacent to the church from Herbert H. Blanchard on July 6, 1915 for \$4,950 to house the orphans and convent.

Although the budget was small, the orphanage did fairly well. The number of children grew from 53 to over 100. Most of their monetary support came from money, which Moscow was sending to New York. In addition to buying food and clothing for the children, this money paid the tuition for their education in the public school system. On January 1, 1917, the Archbishop purchased 160 acres of land from Nelson and Bestey Newton and James and Martha Marshall for \$4,000. Located in Springfield and Weathersfield, it was used to grow vegetables and raise cattle to feed the orphans. A small chapel was also established in a farmhouse located on the property.

In order to understand the chain of events, which took place in Springfield during the next 10 to 15 years, we must understand what was happening to the national church at this time. When Archbishop Evdokim arrived in America, he began to study the religious life in this country in order to assess the needs of his mission. In a report, which he sent to the Holy Synod (Council) of Bishops in Russia in 1916, he stressed that the American mission was growing too fast to be handled adequately by the Church in Russia. He suggested that "it is necessary to grant some kind of autocephaly* to the Mission". In this same report, the Archbishop requested an annual allotment of \$1,000,000 for the mission's expenses. He received only \$550,000, which was inadequate to fund the rapid expansion of the North American Diocese or to pay the \$100,000 debt, which the mission had already accumulated.

On August 6, 1917 Archbishop Evdokim returned to Russia to attend the All-Russian Church Sobor (Council). Initial plans for the Sobor had begun almost 12 years earlier and one can imagine that the Archbishop was excited to think that it was finally to be convened. He went prepared to offer suggestions for the reorganization of his growing mission. In his absence, he requested that Bishop Alexander Nemolovsky of Canada temporarily assume the administrative duties of the mission. Unfortunately, the Archbishop's plans were never to be realized. The Sobor, convened on August 15, 1917, was interrupted by the Russian Revolution.

"The Revolution of October 1917 brought about what the late Metropolitan Leonty called 'the turning point in our history'. This opened the doors to revolution, Bolshevism, the severance of ties with the Mother Church,

the end of material assistance, inner chaos, the growth of personal weaknesses and passions among certain bishops, priests, and laymen.” The revolution broke out on October 25, 1917. The provisional government was abolished and the Tsar and his family were brutally executed. Five days after the initial revolt the Sobor decided to restore the Moscow Patriarchate, which had been abolished by Peter the Great. On November 5, Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow was elected Patriarch; his enthronement took place on November 21. While the Church within Russia proved stable enough to meet the initial shock of the revolution, the diocese outside the country suffered. Not only did the revolution introduce new problems into the American Diocese, but it also exacerbated the existing problems. In the words of Bishop Alexander:

It seems as if all the powers of hell have gathered to sink our Church in the waves of anarchy and atheism; serpents, in human form, create trouble for our mission... covering themselves with reformation and progressiveness, they attempt to destroy the church with axes, hammers and sickles.

Soon after the revolution, Bishop Alexander was informed that Archbishop Evdokim had joined the reform movement in Russia and would not be returning to America. (In 1919, Archbishop Evdokim was appointed Arch-bishop of Nizhegorod and, in 1922, he joined the Living Church as their Metropolitan of Odessa. The Living Church had been formed in Russia as part of the uncanonical dissident movement after the revolution). With money no longer coming from the Mother Church, Bishop Alexander was left to administer to a diocese deeply in debt and plagued with dissident groups forming throughout the country who were questioning the canonicity of his appointment. Not until the Second All-American Sobor of Cleveland in February of 1919 was the Bishop finally elected as Primate of the American Church. Confirmation later came from Russia, firmly establishing Alexander as Archbishop of the North American Diocese.

**Autocephaly comes from the Greek words for self (auto) and head (kephale). It literally means self-headed or self-governing. In church usage, autocephaly refers to those churches, which are in no way dependent for their life and mission upon any other church or churches.*

Unfortunately, during this time, in order to alleviate the financial crisis of the Church, Archbishop Alexander had mortgaged and sold many church properties. The mortgages not only increased the debts of the Church; they also gave his enemies in the various splinter groups some evidence for their accusations. It is clear that the Archbishop was attempting to help the Church out of the troubles he had inherited but had no idea how to do this. It is also a sad fact that when the Cleveland Sobor decided to assess the individual parishes in order to raise money for the Church, there was no cooperation. In 1922, the assessments yielded only \$2,557. The one organization which really helped the Church at this time was the “Society for the Help of the Russian Church”, which raised \$200,000.

Because of the increasing problems and his inability to deal with them, the Archbishop decided to turn over the administration of the Diocese to Metropolitan Platon who had recently returned to America as a refugee from Russia. On June 20, 1922, Archbishop Alexander returned to Europe. The Third All-American Sobor convened in October of 1922 and officially elected Metropolitan Platon as Metropolitan of All America and Canada. But, although Patriarch Tikhon in Russia confirmed this election, two dissident groups immediately challenged his position.

Bishop Stephen Dzubay, a former Uniate priest, had been consecrated Bishop of Pittsburgh in 1917 by Archbishop Evdokim. He later became a senior auxiliary under Archbishop Alexander. Because of his work with Archbishop Alexander, Bishop Stephen apparently believed that he was the rightful successor to the Archbishop. On October 26, 1922, as self-proclaimed “acting head” of the Diocese, he consecrated Adam Philipovsky as bishop of Canada. Bishop Stephen eventually admitted his error and rejoined the Diocese in 1923; “Bishop” Adam waited until 1935 to rejoin.

“Archbishop” John Kedrovsky of the Living Church headed the second dissident group. The story of the Living Church begins in 1922. At this time, Patriarch Tikhon was arrested in Moscow because he refused to cooperate with the new revolutionary government. After his arrest, a group of dissident priests, with government assistance, gained control of the Patriarchal offices and confiscated many items belonging to the Church. They then adopted many uncanonical reforms, such as elevation of married men to the office of bishop and the permission for priests to remarry. Patriarch Tikhon was soon released from prison and regained administrative control of the Church. With the support of the majority of the laity, he condemned the reform group, but with government assistance the dissidents still managed to gain control of most of the churches. In 1923, a council of the new Living Church “deposed” Patriarch Tikhon. They also appointed a married priest, Fr. John Kedrovsky as Archbishop of North America. Archbishop Alexander had suspended Fr. John in 1918 for insubordination. In March of 1924, Kedrovsky began court action to gain control of St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York City, claiming that he was the lawful bishop of the diocese.

In March 1924, the Fourth All-American Sobor was convened in Detroit and accomplished two very important things. It first reconfirmed the election of Metropolitan Platon as head of the North American Diocese and drew up a position statement concerning the false claims made by John Kedrovsky and the Living Church involving church authority and property ownership. Secondly, the Sobor resolved to declare the Russian Orthodox Diocese in America a “temporarily self-governing Church, governed by its elected Archbishop together with the Council of Bishops, a Council composed of elected clergy and laity, and periodic Councils of the entire American Church”. This was the first step towards self-government. Completely cut off from the Mother Church, this was the only way in which this Diocese could survive. Metropolitan Platon continued to lead the Church for the next 10 years until his death in April 1934. During this time the Church slowly but surely fought with the financial debts, the various schisms and the organizational confusion. And this was the atmosphere in which our new, little parish struggled to survive.

As was previously pointed out, in August of 1917, Archbishop Evdokim left the United States for the All-Russian Sobor. This was only eight months after the purchase of the Weathersfield property. With the coming of the revolution in October, both the parish and the orphanage were thrown into financial confusion. It is difficult to understand the relationship between the parish and the orphanage at this time. Obviously, the confusion of the times put a strain on this relationship. The parish was getting enough money from its parishioners to survive but the orphanage was in trouble. Fr. Varlashkin wrote an article, which appeared in a monthly newsletter “Voice of the Church” published by Fr. Alexander Kukulevsky at St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland. He criticized Mother Paulina and stated his concern that the orphans were not receiving proper care. Mother Paulina sued him for liable in 1920 and eventually an out-of-court settlement was made for \$2,500; the sum to be reduced to \$1,000 if Fr. Varlashkin published a retraction in the newsletter. Tensions were so bitter that mention was made in the 1920 Springfield Annual Town Report. The orphanage had been unable to pay the

school tuition for quite some time, and the town expressed its sympathy for the “heroic work” done by Mother Paulina. Unfortunately, the town did not realize (nor could they have understood) that at this time the orphanage was declaring its allegiance to Archbishop Evdokim who had already joined the reform movement in Russia -- cutting himself off from the canonical church. This had become the basis of the disputes between the orphanage and the parish.

In 1922, the same year that Archbishop Evdokim was declared a Metropolitan in the Living Church, Rev. Stakhy Borichevsky arrived to replace Fr. Varlashkin. At some Point Mother Anastasia also replaced Paulina and Rev. Nicholas Strachoff, who was perported to be involved with the Living Church, also arrived to join the orphanage. Tensions between the parish and the orphanage continued to mount due to the orphanage’s continued rejection of Archbishop Alexander as ruling bishop of the North American Diocese. The financial situation at the orphanage continued to deteriorate until, in 1925, foreclosure proceedings were begun on their property. The foreclosure was filed by Springfield Savings Bank on May 12, 1925 and it was drawn up on November 10, 1925. The orphanage was given until November 10, 1926 to pay \$1,936.73 in back payments. The orphanage was unable to do so and the bank sold the property to Ernest Moore and Wade Keyes of Ludlow on December 15, 1926, forcing the group to move to the Weathersfield farm. Joe and Sophie Shaltlucha bought the property on October 13, 1927.

The tensions erupted again in 1927. The Holy Trinity Brotherhood, as representatives of the parish, began legal action against the continued activities of the Living Church in this area. In June of that year, a settlement was made out of court in which Fr. Strachoff, Mother Anastasia, and Sister Martha signed documents releasing them from any connections with the parish on Park Street.

Unable to pay the mortgage on the Weathersfield property, Archbishop Evdokim (whose name is still on the deed) lost this property in a foreclosure on December 14, 1927. Rev. Strachoff and Sister Martha purchased the property the following day with Sister Martha eventually transferring complete ownership to Rev. Strachoff in a quick claim filed on September 15, 1928. Rev. Strachoff sold the property to Adolf and Albina Chrystowski on January 2, 1931.

During the foreclosure proceedings four names were mentioned as claiming to be successors to Archbishop Evdokim: (Metropolitan) Rev. Platon Rozhdestvensky, (Metropolitan) Rev. John Kedrovsky, (Bishop) Rev. Alexander Nemolovsky, and (Bishop) Rev. Adam Philipovsky. It is evident that the confusion which existed at this time in both Russian and American churches, existed, not only in history books or in New York City or in Moscow, but right here in Springfield. This parish experienced its repercussions --the hurt, the bitterness, and the devastation - very personally. Only through the grace of God have we survived. Truly we have experienced what Bishop Alexander proclaimed “It seems as if all the powers of hell have gathered to sink our Church in the waves of anarchy and atheism”.

Fr. Borichevsky was transferred in October of 1929, and from that point until 1973 the church was served in an increasingly sporadic manner with priests staying not much more than a year. At times there was no priest at all. If the parish required one, a priest was sent on a temporary basis. One of the brighter memories during this time occurred in 1952. Bishop John of Chicago stopped in Springfield during his tour of the United States with

the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. Our pastor, Fr. Stephan Lyceshersky, had a special service with a procession around the church, to honor this ancient icon, which is one of the favorites of the Church.

Throughout these hard times the Brotherhood, in shouldering the task of protecting the parish, developed an unfortunate stranglehold on it, and became one of the obstacles to future growth. Not knowing whom to trust, they rarely trusted anyone. This created a vicious cycle as the National Church saw that the priests were sometimes treated less than kindly and avoided making assignments to the parish. So the result was that, over the years, as the National Church grew and developed, our parish continued to decline.

But two seemingly unrelated incidents changed this. In 1965, a member of the parish died and Fr. Michael Dirga was sent from Hartford, Connecticut to perform the funeral service. His friendliness and devotion to the Church impressed everyone who met Fr. Michael. So when, in 1971, a wedding was planned, Fr. Michael was contacted through the National Church offices to perform the wedding service. Knowing that our choir had not practiced in quite some time, Fr. Michael brought his Matushka* and Fr. Deacon Peter Tutko and his wife Sonia to sing for the wedding. Fr. Deacon and Sonia fell in love with the parish. They found the people to be enthusiastic and decided that it was time to revive Orthodoxy in Springfield. (It is interesting to remember that during the drive to Springfield for the wedding Fr. Michael commented that he had a feeling Springfield would be the deacon's first parish. Fr. Deacon fervently replied that he had no intention of moving from the New York-Pennsylvania area to such a rural place!)

The next two years were busy with food sales and a general reorganization. The parish had a long way to go to put itself back on its feet. During this time Fr. Peter was stilling attending school at St. Tikhon's Seminary in South Cannan, Pennsylvania and would come to Springfield on weekends or during the summer. During this time the parish grew to love Fr. Peter and his contagious enthusiasm. In 1973, when he graduated, the parish joyously opened its doors to the first ordination ever celebrated in this parish. On June 2, 1973, Fr. Peter was ordained to the Holy Priesthood by Bishop Dmitri, who was Bishop of the New England Diocese.

*Term of endearment, in Russian, for a priest's wife meaning "Little Mother"

This was the beginning of a renewal in the spiritual life of the parishioners and a renovation of the building itself. The parish adopted the revised Julian calendar and a regular liturgical cycle. In accordance with the National Statutes of the Orthodox Church of America, English was used for all Church services. These changes revealed the beauty of Orthodoxy to many for the first time, and soon the parish was receiving converts. It must also be mentioned that the Springfield parish is the only Orthodox parish in Vermont, which belongs to the Orthodox Church in America.

While Fr. Peter was here, classes were begun for both children and adults. Food and grinder sales, a mainstay of the budget, were begun. A new roof was put on the building, aluminum siding was installed on the steeple, the brick section of the building was sandblasted and a fresh coat of paint was put on the trim. A new bathroom and a new kitchen were installed in the rectory. Also, many liturgical items including vestments, icons and choir books were purchased. Under the director of Matushka Sonja Tutko, the choir began to learn the services and beautiful hymns of the Church. Many years of dust were gradually swept away and the Church was once again a living witness to Holy Orthodoxy.

In addition to Springfield, the Orthodox Church was experiencing a new surge of growth throughout the country. Fr. Peter was transferred to the Southern Diocese to establish a new mission parish in New Port Richie, Florida in June 1978. On July 7, 1978, Fr. John Terrell and his wife, Mary arrived from Holy Trinity Parish in Lynn, Massachusetts. With a fresh outlook and an intense determination to make this parish the best Orthodox parish it could be, they inspired us to become real witnesses to the beauty and truth of our faith. Fr. John continued with the education classes but in everything he did he emphasized the importance of building a strong life of prayer, stressing that only in this way will we truly accomplish the will of God in our lives and build up the Church He has given us.

With the enthusiastic assistance of Matushka Mary, we painted the entire first floor of the church -- scraping off many, many layers of paint and history. Carpeting was installed; new chandeliers were purchased. The old red "stained glass" windows were replaced by plain, opaque glass and we bought and hung new icon prints everywhere. The foyer ceiling was painted and vinyl flooring was installed. The upstairs hallway received a new ceiling, wallpaper, and carpeting.

Despite the disappointments, despite the difficult times, which this parish experienced, there have also been many wonderful memories. Many close friendships have begun in church and have lasted many years. There are, of course, the weddings and baptisms, which are so important in strengthening family ties. There are the memories of the Christmas Yolkas -- plays which the young people of the parish organized each year while dressed in festive native costume and held at the Town House on Main Street (where the Municipal Office is now located).

And now, after looking back, we turned ourselves around to face the challenges ahead. The observance of the 75th Anniversary was a new beginning. As we struggled in the past to be faithful in our observance of the fasts and the feasts of the Church and to be zealous in our prayer, we choose to make whatever sacrifices were necessary for our temple to reflect the iconographic Truth of Orthodoxy. To do this we commissioned an iconographer, Fr. Phillip Koufos of New York City, to write new icons. Most of these were mounted in an icon screen, which was hand crafted by Lloyd's Woodworking of Hudson, Massachusetts.

It is Christ who makes "all things new" and is Himself the new Adam, of Whose Life we are partakers through the Holy Eucharist. He is the image of everything we are to become by grace -- transfigured in Him. He is mystically present with us in His icon, as are His All-Holy Mother and the Saints. The beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven is before us as we worship the Life-giving Trinity in a temple, which manifests the Cosmos redeemed and transfigured in Christ.

We have worked very hard since 1973, but unless we can understand that this gift of transfiguration is not an end in itself for our own glory, but for the glorification of God alone, our work will have been in vain. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it..." (Ps. 127:1) So we concluded that the 75th Anniversary was not the end of 75 years but the beginning of a new challenge which was presented to us.

In April of 1983, Fr. John was transferred and Fr. Alexander Kuchta and his wife, Natalie came to our parish. During this 'time, we were blessed to have a young seminarian, Larry Margitich, meet his future bride, Ann Wassell, a member of our parish studying iconography at St. Vladimir's seminary. Larry's study of music brought a beautiful

new dedication to the choir. He set us up with a full compliment of well-balanced music for our choir and our church. Fr. Alexander left July 21st, 1985 and in came Fr. Mark Sherman, his wife Ann, and their children Sarah, Bill, and Katie. From 1985 to 1993, a very stable period of time with a full compliment of services took place providing spiritual growth.

On May 21st, 1988, Springfield hosted the New England Diocesan Day for the observance of the Millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 988, Grand Prince Vladimir I of Kiev replaced paganism with Eastern Orthodox Christianity. His Grace Bishop Job along with many other faithful from across New England came to celebrate the "Baptism of Rus".

In 1993, Fr. Mark's secular job constraints created the opportunity to begin a mission of Holy Trinity in Montpelier, Vermont and in 1995 he left to pursue it more actively. Arrangements were made for Fr. Peter Carmichael, his wife Karen and their children - Donald, Mary, and David to serve Springfield.

On September 9th and 10th, 1995, we celebrated our 90th anniversary. Metropolitan Theodosius came for the weekend which included Great Vespers, a cookout with old films of past Priests at Holy Trinity, full Hierarchical Liturgy followed by a banquet under the tents on the Church lawn. The Metropolitan called us the "Pearl on the hill" and reminded us of all the history and people that had come through here over the years. It all began with Fr. Alexander Hotovitsky who is now one of our Orthodox American Saints.

In May of 1997, a special parish meeting was held to vote on a major renovation of the church social room. With a unanimous vote to go ahead, construction began late in July and finished late in October. The social room was enlarged, a full kitchen was installed, and a new bathroom was put in, an outside ramp for the physically challenged was built, and new siding with insulation was added to the whole back end of the Church. For such a small parish this was a major undertaking but by God's grace it became a reality much faster then anyone had envisioned.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, visited on June 21, 1998 to serve Hierarcical Divine Liturgy and officially blessed our new parish social room.

As the turn of the century came, the Church continued on its regular path. The past few years have been filled with maintenance projects as the Cross on the steeple was repaired, new rubber roofing was put on, the exterior woodwork was painted, the original front door was replaced with double doors and a new side porch was constructed. The interior was refurbished for the 100th.

We are very blessed to have His Eminence Archbishop Job and His Grace Bishop Nikon to God Grant us all at Holy Trinity Many Years!