

DIOCESAN LIFE: EXTRAORDINARY DIOCESAN CONFERENCE IN MELBOURNE ON DECEMBER 22ND

On Thursday December 22nd Father James and Paul Pereboeff travelled to Melbourne to attend the Extraordinary Diocesan Conference. The Conference - convened especially to elect delegates to the All-Diaspora Council in San Francisco this year - was held in the hall of the new Melbourne Cathedral, now in the final stages of construction. The Cathedral is large and beautiful, with an intricately carved iconostasis and two altars. The hall is also most impressive; built in octagonal form, it resembles a stately ballroom. In attendance were between 60 and 70 clergymen and lay people from Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. The day began with a moleben in the new Cathedral before the "Port Arthur" Icon of the Mother of God. This large icon - over 6ft tall - is visiting the Diocese from Saint Petersburg. All present were given a copy of the icon and of the akathist in its' honour*. Proceeding to the hall, delegates listened to Vladika Hilarion's introduction and to lectures given by two visiting clergymen: Mitred Archpriest Alexander Lebedeff (Los Angeles) and Priest Serafim Gan (New York). Father Serafim spoke first, explaining the meticulous preparations for the historic 4th All-Diaspora Council. Father Alexander then gave a summary of discussions between the Moscow Patriarchate and our Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. After lunch some lively discussion followed, with a number of questions being raised about matters of concern, particularly ecumenism and Church-state relations. It was clear that many delegates amongst both the clergy and laity wish to approach the matter of relations with the Moscow Patriarchate with care and caution. The delegates then proceeded to elect 4 delegates (2 priests and 2 others) to represent the Diocese of San Francisco. Those elected were Archpriest Michael Protopopov (Dandenong), Archpriest Nikita Chemodakov (Fairfield), Protodeacon Basil Yakimov (Canberra) and Nicholas Rotenko (Cabramatta), a delegation that is representative of the views expressed at the Conference. A resolution was composed and endorsed by those present, the text of which appears on the next page.

* It was hoped that this icon would be able to visit our parish, but unfortunately a convenient time could not be arranged.

THE RESOLUTION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY ASSEMBLY OF THE DIOCESE OF SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

The delegates attending this Assembly, representing the parishes, communities, monasteries and convents, heard the Epistle of His Eminence Metropolitan Laurus to the Assembly. The placid, calm and loving tone of the Epistle, and His Eminence's mentioning of the possibility of Eucharistic communion with the Moscow Patriarchate only on the condition that all questions separating us are resolved in accordance with our positions of principle, once more inspired and strengthened the trust we have in the wise leadership of our First Hierarch.

With a feeling of gratitude and loyalty, the Assembly wishes His Eminence, the Helmsman sent by the Lord God, strength and steadiness in steering the Ship of the Church Abroad to a successful goal indicated by God.

Hearing the lectures delivered by the Secretary of the Commission on talks with the Moscow Patriarchate and by the member of the Pre-Council Committee preparing the IV All-Diaspora Council, and discussing all the questions troubling the delegates themselves, after moderate debate, we found it necessary to note that the Diocesan Assembly was attended by delegates of parishes and monasteries of the Diocese of Sydney, Australia and New Zealand. Based on their opinions and statements, the Assembly expresses the hope that the process of spiritual reconciliation with the Moscow Patriarchate would develop at a moderate pace. Among the questions of spiritual principle, the first that requires resolution is the role of the active participation of the Moscow Patriarchate, through its representatives, in the World Council of Churches.

We think that unity must occur organically, naturally and in an unforced way. Without a doubt, this is possible only through the presence of zealous and loving attitude towards the duty of serving the Truth.

We appeal to the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia with the request that they not neglect our opinion and desire to avert any divisions in our Church.

We call upon our flock to pray to the Lord in earnest that His holy will for all of us be done!

CHURCH LIFE: SPECIAL PRAYERS AT DIVINE LITURGY BETWEEN NOW AND MAY 2006

In mid-December, Father James posted out to all parishioners copies of a letter from the Synod of Bishops to all the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. The letter primarily focused on the discussions between our church and the Moscow Patriarchate, and upon the forthcoming All-Diaspora Council. The Synod has directed that two additional petitions be added to the litany after the Gospel at each Divine Liturgy. These petitions are as follows:

"O all-good Master, watch over Thy flock and all the children of the Russian Church Abroad, that we may bring about the structuring of our Church in a manner well-pleasing to Thee. Grant us the spirit of wisdom and understanding; instil in our hearts the spirit of the fear of God, the spirit of piety and zeal for the glory of Thy holy name. Guard us against all temptations, stumbling-blocks and divisions, that being bound together, one to another, by the bond of love for Thee, our Master, we may without hindrance perform the work of our ministry for the edification of the Holy Church as the one Body of Christ. We pray Thee, O greatly Merciful One: Hearken and have mercy!

"O good Shepherd, Who hast promised to gather Thy scattered sheep into a single flock, put down scandal and division within the Church; all who have strayed from Thy path do Thou lead to repentance and a knowledge of the Truth, and return them to Thy fold; and confirm us all in the Orthodox Faith and the doing of Thy commandments. We pray Thee: Hearken and have mercy!"

In accordance with the Synod's directive, we will include these prayers at each Divine Liturgy. Individuals wishing to do so could also add these petitions with their morning or evening prayers, simply reading one or both as time allows.

PARISH LIFE: CHURCH CLEAN-UP ON DECEMBER 28TH

On Wednesday December 28th a number of parishioners - about 15 in all - met at church in order to give things a good cleaning in preparation for Christmas. All the furniture was removed and polished; the oil lamps were cleaned, polished and filled; the icons were dusted and cleaned; the floors were scrubbed; the green vestments were ironed and set out in church; and in general, everything was set in order. The church looked beautiful for the Christmas services on January 6th and 7th - the first

services of 2006 - as a result. Many thanks to all who were able to help out on the day.

PARISH LIFE: SPIDER WARNING

On the evening of January 4th, Father James, George Karmadonoff and Anna Carles were working outside the main church doors, preparing the large Christmas tree that was later placed in the centre of church. As they worked, they were surprised by a somewhat unwelcome visitor: a funnel-web spider! As is well-known, these spiders are highly venomous, and their bites can be fatal. This one was certainly aggressive, and looked quite capable of giving a very nasty bite. The fact that one was found raises the concern that there could be more about, despite the urban setting of our church. Parents are encouraged to keep an eye on their children, and to warn them of the possibility of danger. The Parish Council will discuss the need for pest control at the earliest opportunity.

COASTAL LIFE: BUSHFIRES

The Central Coast had a spectacular beginning to the New Year, with bushfires ravaging areas around Kariong, Woy Woy and Umina Beach. Many people were evacuated from their homes, and some homes were lost to the flames. Sadly, one Saint John Ambulance volunteer died whilst on duty. A drive along Woy Woy Road from the Peninsula to Kariong is a sobering experience - vast areas of bush have been destroyed, and homes by the road are visibly damaged. No parishioners were seriously endangered, although the homes in Father James' street at Umina Beach were evacuated, and the flames came as close as 50 metres away. Father James and family were in Melbourne that weekend, but a friend staying at their home kept them in the picture, and Peter and Tanya Iliuk (also in Umina Beach, but a little farther from the fires) also kindly assisted with news reports and offers of evacuation assistance. All of this gives cause for reflection: how quickly it is that material things can be lost; the importance of turning to God with prayer for deliverance; and the many ways in which we can help and console one another.

VISIT TO OLD MELBOURNE CATHEDRAL

As mentioned above, Father James and his family were in Melbourne over the New Year weekend. Although it is well-known to those of us from NSW that Melbourne is a cold and gloomy place, the heat that weekend was stifling, as elsewhere around the country. Visiting Victoria for a family wedding, Father James, Matushka and the children took the opportunity to attend vigil (arriving a little late after Father James had everyone board the wrong tram!) and Divine Liturgy at the old Holy

Protection Cathedral in Collingwood. The services at the Melbourne cathedral are conducted in Slavonic and English, as at Gosford, with the addition of some petitions in Greek. The cathedral parish is large, diverse and vibrant. This was the first time that Father James had had the opportunity to serve in an interstate church, and so the experience was an interesting one. It was nevertheless nice to return home to our little church at West Gosford for the beautiful Christmas services.

VLADIMIR CHILDREN'S FUND

Our parishioner Katya Rubbo recently passed on some positive news about her involvement with the Vladimir Children's Fund. In early December she and her husband Michael screened their film on Russian families at Saint Vladimir's Church in Centennial Park. The screening went very well, with Katya reporting that more and more people are deciding to get involved and help poor families and the rebuilding of life in Russia.

Donations totalling A\$500.00 were received on the day, and to this was added a further A\$100.00 of donations from our Gosford parish, all of which was sent over to the Vladimir Children's Fund.

During the last two and a half years Katya and Michael have collected A\$3600.00 to provide help to over 16 Russian families. The money provides food and medical care for sick children. Katya has asked that her thanks be passed on to all that have assisted in this good work. May the Lord bless you!

PARISH LIFE: THEOPHANY SERVICES

In the second half of January we have services for the Great Feast of Theophany, or the Baptism of the Lord. After the festal services and the Great Blessing of Waters, Father James will as usual be visiting parish homes to pray and bless each one with Holy Water. Theophany house-blessing has been a part of parish life now since 2002. Those families interested in having their home blessed again this year should either write their name on the list at the candle desk in church, or call Father James. He will be blessing homes on the feast-day itself - Thursday January 19th - and again on the following Saturday - January 21st. What is involved in house blessing? Father James begins the service before the main icons in the home, then sprinkles holy water throughout the house while singing the troparion and kontakion of the feast. Returning to the icons, he prays for the health and salvation of those living there, finally offering the cross for veneration and blessing the people themselves with holy water. It is a very nice service, and an important way of linking home and family life with the life of the Church.

PARISH LIFE: SERVICES IN JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2006

As January 2006 has 5 Sundays, the last Sunday in the month will be one on which the Divine Liturgy is served entirely in English. Matushka Marie will lead the English-language choir, as usual.

On Saturday February 4th and Sunday 5th there will be services for the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, glorified by our Russian Church Abroad 25 years ago this year.

The service to Blessed Xenia scheduled for the evening of Sunday February 4th has been **cancelled**, as the need has arisen for Father James to travel to Sydney that afternoon.

On Tuesday February 14th and Wednesday February 15th there will be services for the Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. After Liturgy on Wednesday there will be the usual blessing of fruit, and also a blessing of candles according to the traditional practice of the church.

READING: NEW ISSUES OF "WORD OF THE CHURCH" AND "THE VOICE"

New issues of the two official diocesan publications are available in church as of Sunday 15th. The January-February 2006 issue of the Russian-language journal "Word of the Church" («Церковное Слово») contains Archbishop Hilarion's Christmas Epistle, an epistle of the Synod of Bishops, Metropolitan Laurus' Epistle to the Australian-New Zealand Diocesan Conference, Christmas greetings from the various parishes and diocesan organisations, and various news items. One item of particular interest is the recent award of a doctorate (PhD) to Archpriest Michael Protopopov of the Dandenong Parish. Father Michael was awarded this degree by the Australian Catholic University for his dissertation "The Russian Orthodox Presence in Australia: The history of a church told from recently opened archives and previously unpublished sources". This is quite an achievement, and one in which both Father Michael himself and the wider church community can take pride. Our congratulations to Father Michael!

The December 2005 issue of "The Voice", the English-language Diocesan journal, is also now available. It contains some profitable spiritual reading in the form of an interview with an Athonite elder, Fr Dionysius. Additional articles concern tithing (the practice of setting aside 10% of one's income for the church) and contemporary paganism.

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT: "A COMPARISON OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOX TRADITIONS IN SYDNEY AND IN MOSCOW"

Father James was recently asked for assistance by Marina Lobastov, a longstanding friend of the parish and one of the stars of the 2005 fundraising concert at the Russian Club. Marina is undertaking studies at Macquarie University towards her Masters' degree. Marina's topic of research is "A comparison of Russian Orthodox Traditions in Sydney and in Moscow". "The aim", she writes, "is to ascertain the differences and similarities that have developed from the separation in space and time of two cultural groups from one origin. At a time when political differences are no longer an issue, I aim to explore the changes that have arisen and the new traditions which have grown and the role which the church now plays in the lives of those who consider themselves to be Russian Orthodox".

Marina has forwarded a questionnaire that she would like interested individuals to complete before spending about an hour with her discussing various aspects of their faith and outlook. An audio recorder will be used with the participant's permission to assist in the collection of data. The material will be analysed and comparisons between the two cities will be drawn. It will be interesting to read her findings, and to see what extent Russian Orthodoxy has taken on certain characteristics in the context of life in Australia. Parishioners are encouraged to support Marina in her interesting and valuable topic of study. To this end, the questionnaires will shortly be made available at the candle desk in church. Electronic copies can be obtained by mailing info@gosfordrussianchurch.org or Marina herself at marinal@usyd.edu.au.

PARISH LIFE: WEBSITE

With the New Year (and a new digital camera) comes a resolution by those involved to keep the website updated each week with news items and photographs. Parishioners are encouraged to keep an eye on the site, and also to have a look at the recent changes to the site content. A number of people outside the parish have remarked favourably on the site, which now has extra information about the composition of the parish, parish life, and Orthodox divine services.

PARISH LIFE: PARISH COUNCIL AND AGM NEWS

The parish council last met in December. The January parish council meeting has been postponed until Tuesday January 31st, at which time there will be a combined January-February meeting. As we settle into "regular" parish life the parish council finds itself with a little less to think about than at times in the past, and so can afford to take a short break.

In mid-December, Father James received confirmation from Vladika Hilarion of his ratification of the decisions and elections at the 2005 Annual General Meeting. In his letter Vladika also invoked God's blessing upon the parish council, sisterhood, choir, parish school teachers, parish workers, and the parishioners of and worshippers at our church.

PARISH LIFE: SEMINARIAN VISITS

A frequent visitor at our church last year was Ian Michie, a school teacher and a parishioner at All Saints of Russia Church, Croydon. For the past few months, Ian has been undertaking graduate theological studies at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. Back home for a break, Ian will - God willing - be visiting Gosford on Sunday January 15th. Father James has invited Ian to read the Apostol that Sunday. Please keep Ian in your prayers as he undertakes study that will equip him for service to our Holy Orthodox Church.

CHURCH LIFE: THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL ARE ASKED FOR:

The sick & suffering: Metropolitan Vitaly, our parishioner Antonina (Tialshinsky), Vladimir, Vladimir, Nadezhda, Vasili, Nina, Vera, Daniel, Eugenia. Prayers are also asked for the health of Father Tony Stace, a Roman Catholic priest from Forster who has greatly assisted the Orthodox mission there.

Families with new babies: Nina, Andrew, and their new baby girl (born 10 weeks premature on 29/11)

Expectant mothers: Helena, Tamara

Preparing for marriage: Reader Luke and Elise

Newly-departed: Ioann (Hadarin, the father of Protodeacon Vasili from Cabramatta); Norman

Various needs: All those involved in the organization of the 4th All-Diaspora Council and in discussions with the Moscow Patriarchate; George & family; our parishioner Andrew Kfoury, serving overseas with the Australian Army, and his family Samantha, Christopher and Jasmine; Katherine, David, Timothy and family, Paraskeva, Antonina, Nicholas & family; Robert, Lyn & family



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Our parish newsletter will be published monthly. If you wish to receive it by post or email, please talk to Father James (0428-639156) or Katya Marcotrigiano, the parish secretary (4369-1765).