Hail, Bridge that truly leads from death

to life all who praise you...

– Akathist Hymn

Χαίρε, ἡ γεφυρά οντως ἡ μεταγούσα εκ θανάτου

πάντας τοὺς ὑμνοῦντας σὲ...

– Ακαθιστόν Ὑμνὸν

Dormition of the Mother of God
Greek Orthodox Church

600 South Willard Street • Burlington, Vermont
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Sponsor of this issue of The Bridge ♦ Ν ΓΕΦΥΡΑ

(=none)

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Religious Education

Sunday Church School Director
Presvytera Aimee Ehrs
(217) 621-8260
aimee.ehrs@gmail.com

Sponsors needed! This newsletter is our main outreach ministry, sending the message of faith and community to all the members of our parish and others. As a sponsor, you become an important partner in this ministry. Donation: $50 or more.

Please send the following information to Fr. Ephraim:

☐ Yes! I will sponsor an issue of THE BRIDGE ♦ Ν ΓΕΦΥΡΑ.
Name ________________________________
In honor or memory of / To celebrate ____________________________
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Music Ministry

Choir Director
Presvytera Anthe Athas

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Vasilios Contis
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_________________________________________________________________
This is Christ’s Great Commission to the Church. With these words, Matthew concludes his account of the Good News. This Gospel moves very quickly, in a single chapter of twenty verses, from Christ’s resurrection, to the appearance to the women disciples, to the gathering of the disciples at Galilee, to the Great Commission.

An examination of the Greek grammar helped me better understand where the emphasis lies. In relating this commandment, the Evangelist starts with four main verbs in Greek: go, make disciples, baptizing, and teaching. It is an active command, directing us to go out into the world and make disciples by means of baptizing and teaching. In these verses, Christ doesn’t tell His eleven disciples (“students”) to stay put in Jerusalem and make a strong Church there. They are clearly now apostles, those who are “sent forth” to make disciples of everyone.

In other words, we are called to continually seek out and invite others to join us in the faith. We are to tell people as we are walking around about the great joy and hope we have in Jesus. And as they join us and come to believe in Jesus Christ, we are to baptize them, that is, to make them members of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the Church visible and invisible. In baptism, we die and rise with Christ, becoming new persons. We become holy, transformed by Christ’s grace through active participation in the life of the Church.

Since the rise of Islam in the seventh century, this is the first time we actually possibly are witnessing the total and complete annihilation of Christian populations in otherwise Christian countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In our own country, the subtle but precarious fusion of politics, cultural shifts, and moral understandings are ultimately undermining and eroding our Orthodox faith to the point where we as faithful Orthodox Christians are in danger of becoming “Cafeteria Christians” (as Metropolitan Methodios spoke of in keynote address at the Metropolis Clergy–Laity last fall). This means that we pick and choose our Orthodox faith not according to Holy Tradition, but according to cultural, societal, and political trends.

I don’t think I have to spell out the dangers in this habit. In this otherwise post-Christian world, we must as Orthodox Christians more adamantly, become more informed, and better able to diligently defend, study, and live our faith. This does not mean I should preach harsher sermons, or that we need to use more judgmental language, but that we must establish a more authentic, serious, and dedicated Christian faith lived actively in the world. We can no longer hide in our churches and rituals, but must be on the offensive spiritually in our homes, schools, communities, and governments. If someone we meet speaks openly against Jesus Christ, we should courageously respond and defend our faith and our tradition.

The Church is under attack domestically and abroad. Our answer cannot be to grip tighter to the idols of money, affluence, and worldly status. But we must bravely embrace the life-giving cross and deepen our love of God through private and communal prayer and worship, study of the Scriptures and texts that help us grow in the faith, and fast with joy and prayer—so that when encountering other people, we can educate and enlighten those hostile to or unfamiliar with Orthodox Christianity. Equally important is for us to encounter others as persons.
No longer can we simply sign a check or push some cash into a beggar’s can. We must rather invite the person, the individual, to experience Christ Jesus. And we must not be too busy to truly listen during our encounters with human beings, created in the image and likeness of God. When we look truly, we see beyond the stereotypes.

In this world, our witness must be authentic and serious. I would like to encourage all of you to see our community’s mission as not only to sustain our faith and heritage, but also to actively make the joy of Christ’s resurrection known to others. This starts with us as individuals taking serious steps of making Christ our center and our whole life. We can no longer be passive in our faith. Jesus Christ must come first.

I know that you love our Church as much if not more than I do. You know that the Church is not simply a building or institution, but a living body, the body of Christ. All of us by virtue of our baptism are members in Christ. This also demands that we take seriously the commandments of Christ. At the Last Judgment, we will be held responsible for our answer to Christ’s command to live and preach His Gospel.

How can we on a serious level witness to our community? I am looking to actively engage us in some charitable work. But we also must learn about our faith and how to be transformed by Christ into the whole glorious person that He intends us to be. This is our calling and our purpose as disciples of Christ.

– Fr. Ephraim

More photos from the Blessing of Lake Champlain & Vasilopita Cutting
Photos by Angelike Contis

George Bennis retrieves the cross after the line snaps.

Fr. Ephraim and Prez Anthe do the honors.

Choir Rehearsals for Lent & Pascha

If you’d like to join the choir this Lenten season and Pascha, please come to our rehearsals:

Saturday, February 22, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm
(after the Divine Liturgy on the first Psychosavato; bring a bag lunch if you’d like)
Rehearsal for Sundays of Lent and review translations of “Christ is Risen”

Saturday, March 15, 9:30 – noon
Palm Sunday, Holy Week & Easter

Saturday, April 5, 9:30 – noon
Engomia & Sundays after Pascha

Additional practice if needed:
Thursday, April 10, 7–9 pm
While you are reading this, the Holy Spirit is moving in the hearts of thousands in northern Guatemala and southern Mexico and drawing them into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Christian Mission Center, in service to His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras in Mexico City, is working to develop a new seminary in the village of Huehuetenango, Guatemala, to prepare local clergy to shepherd this flock. Two long-term missionary families, Fr. John and Presbytera Sandy Chakos (left), as well as Fr. David and Matushka Rozanne Rucker (right), are already on the ground and will soon be followed by a third family, Fr. Peter and Matushka Styliana Jackson (bottom, shown with members of the Huehuetenango community).

Together they will help form the curriculum that will serve the local young men who are answering the call to serve as priests in this region. A short-term mission team, just this past summer, traveled to Huehuetenango and began construction on the seminary buildings and housing.

With Coin Boxes and Sunday school lesson plans, the youth of our parish will be learning about and participating in the mission work being done in Guatemala. Throughout Great Lent, in addition to placing their offering in our orange safe—which is designated for International Orthodox Christian Charities and a local philanthropic organization, to be determined by the students—we’ll be saving our change at home. Coin Boxes will be distributed on Mission Sunday and returned on Palm Sunday (April 13).

All monies raised through this year’s Coin Box Program will benefit the training, preparation, and deployment of the missionaries that will serve the Church in Guatemala.
Philoptochos News & Announcements

The Philoptochos Society is the official philanthropic organization of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Our new newsletter heading shows the icon of the patron saints of Philoptochos, Saints Cosmas & Damian the Unmercenaries

Thank you to Theodora Contis, Prez Anthe, and Voula Zontanos for their wonderful Vasilopetes, and to YOU! Your donations helped us send $200 to the National Philoptochos Fund for St. Basil’s Academy. God bless you all!

Please mark your calendars:

♥ Note: There is no meeting in February. Our next regular meeting is MARCH 2.
♥ Saturday, April 12: SPRING BAKE SALE
   ▼ Tuesday, April 8, 9:30 am: Baklava, crescents, and other baking
   ▼ Friday, April 11, 10:00 am: Cupping and setup

Make this the year you show your support by becoming a member!

Reminder: Membership dues of $20 are “due” now through April.

CHARITY = LOVE

Okay, so the word “charity” comes from a Latin word, but it still means “love.” We show our love for our fellow human beings by doing acts of charity. We have many opportunities in our parish to show Christian love, and many of you have been very generous in your support. Supporting Philoptochos in its work shows Christian love, and so is participating in various other charitable works. We have two projects you can participate in right now:

1. CAN TAB collection to benefit Ronald McDonald House
2. CLEANING PRODUCT collection for JUMP (Joint Urban Ministries Project), an ongoing charity to help the poor in our own Greater Burlington community.

Containers for these items are in the Church Hall. Let us all be aware of the needs that present themselves and the great opportunities for showing Christian love.

1 Corinthians 13 says it all!

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:1–13, NKJV)
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Epiphany Blessing of Lake Champlain

After the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, January 12, about 40 members of our community joined Fr. Ephraim at the Burlington Boat House to bless the waters of Lake Champlain. Relatively fair January was predicted for the morning, but turned instead to clouds and flurries—the wind coming off the lake was biting. As the group gathered around for the prayers and hymns, George Bennis climbed down to the water’s edge in order to throw the wooden cross. But when the line tied to the cross caught on a rock and snapped, he pulled off his socks and shoes to go in for it.

After the blessing, the Parish Council and Philoptochos welcomed us back to the church with Vasilopita and hot soup.

Thanks to Angelike Contis’s write-up and photography, our community made the front page of The National Herald (www.thenationalherald.com/34648). For more pictures, see page 4 of this newsletter.