

December, 2007



From Our Parish President ...

Cont'd from p. 7 of the "Outreach" Newsletter

15. Accepted the recommendation that Parish members 90 years of age and over be designated as honorary members and that they enjoy all membership privileges without having to pay the initial donation for membership privileges. The recommendation to be implemented in 2008.

16. Accepted that one week of vacation time from 2007 for Fr. Victor be transferred to 2008.

17. Heard from Dr. Ernest Skakun, that the UOCC has developed Revised UOCC By-laws and that the By-laws and all related and relevant documents, once available, should be reviewed by the Parish. However to do so, would also require, as a prerequisite, a study of the Guiding Principles of Vision 2000: A Bible Study. The latter are available at the Parish office and accessible online from at www.uocc.ca.

18. Heard from Dr. Ernest Skakun inquiring whether the Consistory had a procedures and policy handbook considering that the Parish develops policies and such polices should be aligned with the policies of the UOCC. Fr. Victor reported that the UOCC has a handbook, which should be on file in the Parish office.

19. Heard from Dr. Ernest Skakun informing the program for the recognition of members of the Parish's committees, organizations and volunteers.

20. Accepted that survey be undertaken to determine Parish members' interest in going caroling and/or receiving carolers at their homes. Mrs. Lesia Perritt volunteered to coordinate the effort.

21. Heard from Mrs. Stephanie McNee that three \$10.00 food vouchers have been distributed to people requesting assistance.

22. Scheduled the **next Board meeting for December 10 2007.**

Something to think about:

The guest speaker at the most recent Western Diocese Conference was Rt. Rev. Protopresbyter Oleg Krawchenko. The title of his talk was "Our Church: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow". In my conversations with Fr. Oleg, it is my understanding that the talk will be submitted for publication in the journal *Faith and Culture*. While his entire talk was very informative and interesting, the part of his talk dealing with "Tomorrow" offered most for what we should be thinking about. Fr. Oleg offered FIVE challenges, which I will share with you.

1. There is an urgent need for better religious education of our membership. We need to increase the level of faith literacy. We tend to criticize the Church but how can we do this when we are faith illiterate. There is a high priority for Orthodox Christian education for all.

2. Focus attention on local community development. This requires a strong base of spiritual active and vital parishes. The life of parishes needs to be reorganized – every parish should be an Eucharistic community. The most important and basic aspect of the Church is the parish, which is the hub of Orthodoxy.

3. Clergy and laity need to re-dedicate themselves. We need to facilitate new leadership; we need to prepare for the succession of leadership in advance; otherwise we have a crisis. We need to participate in the laity ministries of the parish - whatever talent you have that God gave you, use it and develop it.

4. There is a need for an honest assessment of our membership and our place in society. Who are we? What do we hope to be in 5 years, 10 years from now? What are our goals and priorities? We are Canadians. Our ties to Ukraine are not as strong now as they were generations ago. Ukraine is no longer the "fairlyland" talked about by our grandparents. The problems of Ukraine must be resolved by Ukraine. However, maintaining heritage and culture are important. If we loose our faith in our Church, then we will loose our heritage. Heritage is preserved through Orthodoxy.

5. We need to renew our Inter-Orthodox and Ecumenical relationships. We need to re-establish our relationships with other Orthodox and Christian religions and we need to have a closer relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Ukraine.

Fr. Oleg has given us much to think about; not just something to think about. The challenge before us to is to move from "thinking" to "doing".

God Bless!

Ernest N. Skakun – Parish President

The Spiritual Labor of Non-condemnation

The venerable Maxim the Confessor says: "Should we not tremble, hearing how God the Father, without judging anyone Himself, *'hath committed all judgment unto the Son'* (John 5:22)? And the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, says to us: *'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged'* (Luke 6:37). Similarly Apostle Paul says: *'Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes'* (1 Cor 4:5), and again: *'for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself'* (Rom 2:1). I tell you, it is so: for men, having ceased to weep over their own sins, have taken the judgment out of the hands of the Son, and judge and condemn each other as though they themselves were sinless! Truly this frightens the heavens and makes the earth tremble."

Centuries pass, yet men still stand before this unassailable wall of condemnation and are unable to overcome it. Adam, justifying himself in paradise before God, condemned Eve; Cain, having condemned his brother Abel in his heart, killed him; the sin of condemnation led the Jews to kill the Messiah; and we, modern Cainites and Pharisees, are pushed by condemnation to a daily spiritual execution of our brothers.

Judgment tortures the doers of it themselves, takes away their peace of mind, forces them to continuously monitor the actions of those around them, and poisons their souls with the bitter poison of suspicion.

An elder once said: "It is easy to step unto the path of salvation: you must firmly decide that from this moment you will no longer judge anyone." We can understand these words with our mind, but how do we actually accomplish them? For this we must understand why we judge others. The reason lies in our false self-evaluation: he judges others, who feels that he has a right to judge, who places himself higher than others, who sees himself blameless of the sins of which he accuses others. Whoever is not aware of his own spiritual corruption, will never cease to judge others.

But we are all tarnished by sin, we all agonize over our corruption, we all hope for deliverance in eternal life, we all have need of Divine aid. Again we know all this theoretically, but in practice it is painfully difficult to refrain from judgment; we yearn to judge others. Why? Because judgment has become a passion with us and, like all vices, it gives us demonic pleasure, a shiver of prideful delight. How "delightful" to judge someone in the course of a friendly conversation, to laugh at another's deficiencies ... But do we not heed the warning of the Gospel that some day we will have to answer for **every single word** we utter, and that includes this false delight which is based on condemnation?

The struggle against the vice of judgment, like any other vice, cannot be theoretical; it must take place everyday, every minute, throughout one's entire life; it must be based on forcing oneself to be attentive to all one's words and thoughts. In other words, we cannot do without spiritual labor.

But of what should this spiritual endeavor consist in such a case? In monitoring oneself with utmost attention throughout all the various circumstances of life. Moreover, we will soon notice that, in the course of the day, occasions for judgment surround us like invisible underwater reefs and threaten to destroy the ship of our soul. However, with God's help, we will gradually learn to avoid collision with these underwater reefs: where we formerly became irritated — we will remain calm; where we became angry — we will remain silent; where we tried to justify ourselves — we will remain humble; where we judged others — we will pray for them and for ourselves, in order to avoid similar sins.

Very soon we will notice that our soul, no longer burdened by judgment, will experience genuine spiritual joy and lightness; and that is only natural, since the yoke of the sins of others will no longer oppress us.

Just as judgment attracts other vices: anger, quarreling, enmity, so a victory over condemnation opens the way to other virtues: pure prayer, tranquility, a true evaluation of one's sins. It is for this reason that demons do their best to ensnare the soul into the nets of judgment, and to hinder its liberation from this vice. In turn we, too, have no right to delay our struggle with judgment for the same reason, but must immediately begin to watch ourselves attentively.

"To watch oneself" is the golden rule of Christian morality, which — alas! — is so often neglected by Christians. How much effort we spend on external activities and how little energy we save for the task of monitoring ourselves. And yet, without this internal endeavor, nothing external will ever lead us to salvation ...

Saint Seraphim of Sarov said that the goal of Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. And to attain this goal we must step unto the path of a spiritual struggle with passions, and with God's help, overcome them one by one. But we can begin the battle with this same passion for judgment.

Let us remember the words of the elder: "It is easy to step unto the path of salvation: you must only firmly decide that from this moment you will no longer judge anyone."

-Monk Vsevolod (Filipyev)