

St Philip Church

Souderton, PA

Spring Update 2015

"Bless the Lord, you winter cold and summer heat, sing and exalt Him unto all ages!" (Song of the Three Holy Youths, Daniel 3:67)

As our diocese thaws from a brutally cold and snowy winter, the hearts of Orthodox Christians at **St. Philip's, Souderton, PA** are continuing to warm to the great calling of our life in Christ! *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works!" (Ephesians 2:10)*. Here's a little glimpse of the flowers opening up to bloom in God's garden in South Eastern Pennsylvania:

Services

The Special Lenten Services have been celebrated and sung with reverence, thanksgiving and prayer. We're especially grateful to God for our Youth Choir, which sang one of the Akathists and also one of the Liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts. While our choir is always beautiful with a prayerful and joyous sound, the sweet voices of the children open our hearts. *"From the mouths of children and babes Thou hast perfected praise!" (Matthew 21:16)*

Education

We were very thankful for our recent **Lenten Retreat**. Fr. Josiah Trenham came from Southern California to deliver lectures about the Church as a Spiritual Hospital. He is a gifted speaker and an apt teacher, and challenged us strongly to take the medicine of the sacraments with asceticism. He brought his talks to a practical conclusion talking about how healing Self-Indulgence (starting with moderation and keeping Sunday as the Lord's Day through attending services and then serving others) will be a strong start in bringing the other sicknesses of our souls (the passions) back in order. I encourage everyone to tune in to his podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio as well his other teachings made available by Patristic Nectar Publications.

We had a very nice **class on St. Athanasius's classic work, *On the Incarnation***. This was presented by Dr. Brian Fitzgerald, a parishioner with a Ph.D. in patristics. He underlined the "Divine Dilemma" and outlined different models of understanding salvation in St. Athanasius' era.

I've been leading a **study on the Anaphora of St. Basil the Great**. This is the moving and theologically rich prayer used during the Sundays of Great Lent and other solemn holy days. The many scriptural references have been brought to bear on this most beautiful presentation of Salvation History.

We have a number of very serious inquirers, both families and individuals. It is a joy to engage people as they are taking their first steps in Christ's Church.

Youth

Thanks to God, our Sunday School and Teen SOYO programs are going strong. They went ice skating together recently to continue to build up their relationships.

Besides the teens' discussion of contemporary issues and how to defend the Christian faith, they are preparing for the Bible Bowl by studying St. Raphael's life very carefully. Also, on a monthly basis a

small group of teens visits shut-in parishioners and clean the church after the Divine Liturgy. They are looking forward to a day of work and prayer at St. Thekla convent shortly after Pascha.

We are looking forward to about **25 children attending Antiochian Village** this summer to gather spiritual nectar. Several teens are applying to be Counselors and CITs at AV, as well as to volunteer at the Special Olympics Camp.

Our Teens recently hosted a **retreat** led by Marek and Allison Simon. Their topic was “Who does God want me to be.” While Marek & Allison were here, the Handmaidens (young women of the parish) welcomed Allison as a special guest for a **Handmaiden’s Tea**. She spoke to them about her becoming Orthodox and being an Orthodox woman.

Outreach, Ministry and Evangelism

Our outreach team continues with ongoing **collections for the local food pantries**. In March, we are also receiving directed donations to benefit a local Christian crisis pregnancy center. We are grateful to **support missionaries and mission churches** in America and overseas. Our Evangelism team is reorganizing to more effectively **support the parishioners as “Everyday Evangelists.”**

We recently had a **“friends and family day”** -- when parishioners are particularly encouraged to bring visitors along. We had 5 visitors in attendance. While we’ve had more in the past, two of them stayed for an in-depth church tour and had many wonderful questions from their protestant perspective. Whether we get 15 visitors or five, it is a good reminder to parishioners that a simple invitation to church, or repeated invitations, can make a big difference in someone’s life. It made a big difference in mine.

We are starting to plan for our **4th Annual International Food Festival**. The primary purpose of this is to “raise the profile” of our parish in the immediate community.

New Icons

Our Beautification has earnestly begun to illumine the narthex, which will be the last phase of our Iconography plan. We are so pleased with the standing saints adorning the walls of that often overlooked but meaningful part of the church.

Parish Family Development

The Emphasis for 2015 has been *“building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4)*. We are intentionally working on **strengthening relationships** among parishioners and helping each person find their niche in a ministry. I am especially excited about one project towards that end: our parish council has undertaken a “Photo-Directory” put together by the parish. The advantage of doing it ourselves, rather than contracting with a studio, is that we can keep the cost and pressure down and take pictures after Liturgy Sunday.

None of this good work, which we offer to God in trying to grow into His love, mercy, and presence with us, would be possible without the generous and faithful support of the stewards of the parish, the assistance of the parish council, the dedication of the choir and Sunday School teachers and teen advisors, the consistency of the choir, the self-sacrifice of my brother clergy: Fr. Boniface, Fr. James, and Dn. Herman, and the oversight of our beloved Bishop THOMAS and our new Metropolitan JOSEPH.

For all of this we give thanks and yet we offer a humble prayer to God. For He and His people deserve more. *“The Lord has become everything for you, and you must become everything for the Lord”* - St. John of Kronstadt.

There is so much more to be done. *“The harvest is truly great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”* (Luke 10:2). Wherever you are, join us in taking our Christian life, grace and good works, very seriously. Join us in this springtime of the soul for an eternal summer!

In Christ,
+ Fr. Noah