



## Wyoming Valley Orthodox Christian Choir reconvenes after a two year hiatus

About ten years ago, a group of parishioners throughout the Wyoming Valley expressed a desire to expand their liturgical music repertoire. Forming a regional choir would allow them to explore musical arrangements that are not regularly sung every Sunday. Also, in some parishes, there are not enough singers to sing each part. So, this is an opportunity for several Orthodox Christians to perform in a full choir, to learn from one another, and to exchange ideas for future performances.

The choir performed for eight years on special feast days and events, such as weddings, throughout the diocese. Due to busy schedules, however, the choir has not met in the past two years. After such a long break, two of the original members felt a yearning to start up the choir again. Co-directors, Greg Polk and Reader Matthew Hoidra, both felt that sharing liturgical music

is an important ministry of the Orthodox Christian Church. The hymnography of our church imparts its theology and history. As Greg pointedly stated, “[liturgical music] must be sung prayerfully” to draw us deeper into our faith, experience communion with God, and also to bring non-believers to the Truth. Many seekers have been so moved by the music that they want to know more about the faith. Therefore, sharing the music outside of a regular liturgical service is vital to the health and growth of the church.

The choir currently consists of parishioners from several churches: Holy Trinity (Wilkes Barre), Holy Resurrection (Wilkes Barre), St. John the Baptist (Edwardsville), and St. Mary’s Byzantine Catholic Church. For information about upcoming performances or joining the choir, please contact Greg Polk at [lgmcpolk@verizon.net](mailto:lgmcpolk@verizon.net) or (570) 283-0698.

# IMAGES OF ORTHODOX EA

by

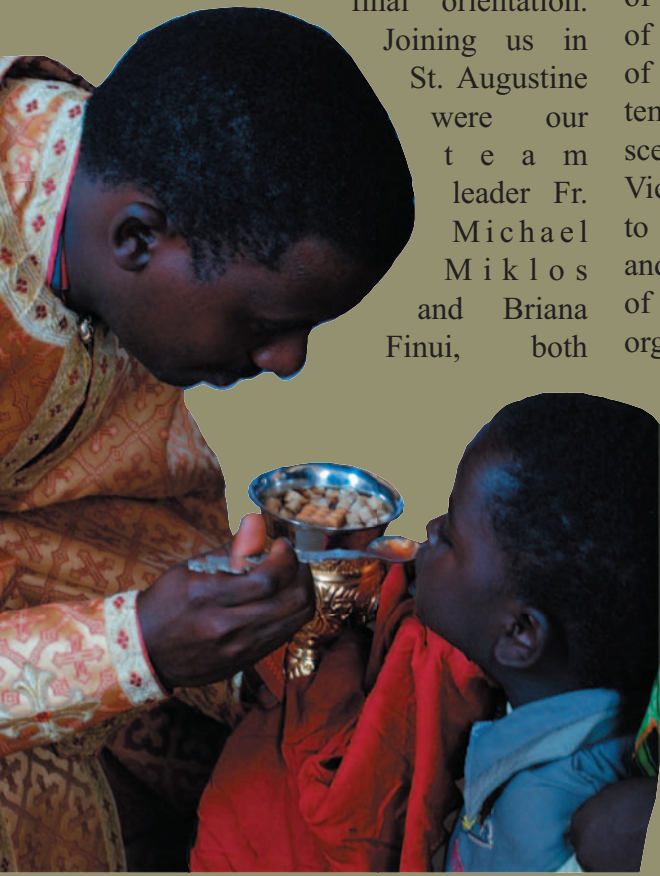


After months of fundraising and anxious preparation, my son Michael and I finally embarked on our very first mission trip. On July 27<sup>th</sup> we departed for the remote regions of Tanzania in East Africa.

This trip proved to be the most exciting and exhilarating journey I have ever been on, yet at the same time the most exhausting.

Our mission commenced on the shores of Florida's eastern Atlantic coast in the historic city of St. Augustine. We were warmly welcomed by the dedicated staff of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center who provided us with our final orientation.

Joining us in St. Augustine were our team leader Fr. Michael Miklos and Briana Finui, both



of the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese. The four of us comprised the American side of our mission team. We met the other half – four members of the Church of Finland – in Amsterdam. Our international team was co-sponsored by SCOBA (Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas) and the Orthodox Church of Finland. Ours was the first OCMC mission team equally composed of four members from two different countries.

As soon as we touched down in Uganda, we knew we had entered another world. The main roads were lined with endless vendors selling various goods from small wooden shacks. Women wore colorful tongas with small babies strapped across their backs, yet somehow managing to balance tall round baskets on top of their heads, amid a noisy and never-ending stream of pedestrians, bicycles and speeding automobiles.

We finally arrived in the small town of Kayanga located in the district of Karagwe in the northwestern tip of Tanzania, which was to be our temporary home. Karagwe is near the scenic southwestern shore of Lake Victoria. Our task was twofold: first, to teach courses on Orthodox faith and theology to one hundred students of various ages at a special seminar organized by the local Metropolitan, Jeronymos of Mwanza; and secondly, to be 'ambassadors of good will' to the people of Tanzania as we travelled with the Metropolitan to various communities throughout his diocese.

Under the inspired leadership of Metropolitan Jeronymos, this particular region of Tanzania is experiencing an incredible thirty

percent annual growth rate, with a new seminary, churches, clinics and schools. Metropolitan Jeronymos was born in Uganda and educated in Athens and is fluent in both Greek and English. It was a great honor to work with this man and his devoted staff in such a unique and blessed ministry. Our teaching mission was only one segment of the longer seminars organized by the Metropolitan, where he gathers selected young people, and future leaders and teachers from various villages of his diocese. Nurses, educators, tradesmen and other professionals are invited to provide workshops on agriculture, construction, economics, health and hygiene. The students return home and pass their newly acquired knowledge and skills to their fellow villagers, improving the overall quality of life in their village.

The poverty we encountered was incredible. Tanzania is one of the poorest places on earth. Many homes in the rural areas are constructed out of mud-bricks and bamboo sticks. The average life expectancy for Tanzanians is only around fifty years. Many suffer from malaria and yellow fever, and in many areas there is no clean water or adequate sanitation.

Despite such extreme poverty, the people were still so joyful and dignified. Most memorable were the smiling faces and joyful voices of the young children who would often flock around us wherever we went, with wide smiles spread across their eager-eyed faces shouting 'Mzungu!', 'Mzungu!', which means 'White-man' in Swahili. We taught our classes in English, with the help of a translator. It was strange at first, speaking only in short, concise phrases, and then having to wait for each phrase to be translated

# EAST AFRICA

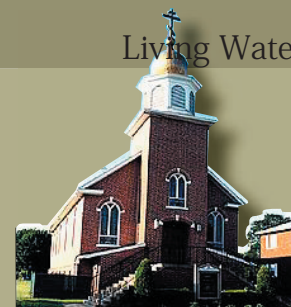
by Professor Harry Boosalis

into Swahili. Somehow it worked out better than expected. It was a joy to see the positive responses and genuine interest reflected in the eyes of our students.

Among our most cherished memories were the opportunities to personally accompany His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronymos on his long journeys through the remote regions of his diocese. It was a moving experience to travel with him as he visited communities and schools and consecrated new churches. This year alone the Metropolitan is scheduled to consecrate thirty new churches! We were warmly received into all the parish communities we visited. The joyous receptions with which they honored us after Liturgy, as they 'brought out the drums' and danced for us, will remain with me forever.

Celebrating the Liturgy in Swahili amid the loud and harmonious congregational singing was an experience of a life-time. Many of the faithful knew the Liturgy by heart, and the delight they shared as they sang praises to the Lord was felt by all. Metropolitan Jeronymos has a very elegant, even regal way about him as he serves the Divine Liturgy. Dressed in his hierarchical vestments, he was always clothed in truly Christ-like love and humility. Watching him interact as an arch-pastor among his young priests and witnessing the loving, pastoral relationship he has with the people of his distant communities – even dancing with them to the beat of their African drums after Liturgy – is to see a genuine missionary at work; a missionary man in the truest sense of the word; a man specially 'sent out' by God. One of the most encouraging aspects of the mission was to see how the Lord used us to reach out (cont.)

Name: Holy Annunciation  
Location: Berwick  
Size: 85 members  
Founded: 1909  
Clergy: Fr. Michael Demko



At the turn of the twentieth century and until the year 1907, a group of thirty or more immigrant families of Slavic and Russian descent settled in the western part of Berwick. Their goal was to find work and locate a place to worship. They purchased a church and property.

However, due to minor differences in dialect and issues over control of the church property, dissension arose among the members of the parish. In 1909, a resulting split occurred and, following a period of court litigation, the church became the property of the Ukrainian faction. The Czech and Russian factions, staunch in their determination to continue together in the holy worship, returned to Orthodoxy.

Several rooms were rented in a large store building directly across from the present church on Second Avenue where services were held from 1909 to 1910. The Rev. Andrew Bohoslavsky served the first Divine Liturgy. A wooden structure was constructed in 1910. The newly constructed church, was consecrated on Thanksgiving Day in 1910 by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Platon.

In 1923, a new brick church was constructed to replace the original church which was damaged by a fire. Bishop Stephen Dzubyay dedicated the new church.

Due to the increasing membership several additions were added to the church over the next few decades. The most recent renovation began in 2004 to enclose the front entrance steps allowing covered access from the church to the lower level; a handicapped bathroom and lift; increased storage space; a new candle room; and a library/conference room. The front entrance renovation was dedicated on May 21, 2005 by Bishop Tikhon.

Over the past hundred years, twenty-one priests have served our parish. Among them are Fr. Paul Holoziak who served from 1967-1971, Fr. Andrew Shuga who served the Church for thirty years from 1971 until his falling asleep in 2001, Fr James Weremedic who served from 2001-2008.

Our present rector, Reverend Michael Demko, came to Holy Annunciation in August of 2008. The parish is active in several ministries at this time: Holy Annunciation Ladies Organization; church school; adult education; and several outreach projects including a weekly nursing home ministry and participation in a local soup kitchen. This past year the church school organized an end of the school year ice cream social for area students and our parish invited the public to celebrate the feast of St Panteleimon with an akathist and anointing of oil from his holy relics. We hope to make these both annual events. In October, we will celebrate our centennial. Our celebrations consist of a balalaika orchestra concert, a church open house with church tours and an introduction to Orthodoxy through liturgical music, a guest speaker, and a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with a celebratory banquet.

Parish Profile

and touch the hearts of these young African believers, even through the means of a translator. In a quiet yet sincere way, I could sense an inner connection with the students through the attentive yet endearing looks in their eyes. Somehow, by God's grace, we pray that the spiritual seeds planted in the souls of those young believers will continue to grow and blossom forth.

Another great lesson learned from the success of our team was the importance of being patient with one another, and how vital it is not to impose our own will on those around us. Our teaching team, despite coming from such diverse backgrounds, somehow gelled so easily together. We felt like family. I realize now how beneficial it was to let God's will unfold according to His way and His time, and not according to ours. It was amazing to see the wonderful ways the Lord continues to work in His vast vineyard, through so many different, dedicated and uniquely talented people – if we only let Him. It was remarkable, and at the same time humbling, to see how grateful our African brothers and sisters were to us for coming to Tanzania. They expressed their gratitude through the joyous beat of their beloved drums and the rhythmic movements of their traditional dancing. Such sights and sounds will never be forgotten.

Amid such extreme poverty, I saw and shared in the innate joy of these beautiful people. I found a renewed sense of reassurance in God's great and fathomless providence for all of His precious children. And I realized how vastly different God measures the true quality of human life; how His values differ from ours; and how contrary they seem when compared with the ways of the world: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts." [Isaiah 55. 8,9] May our Lord continue to bless the holy ministry of His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronymos, and all the faithful throughout the Church of Tanzania, for many, many years. And may He grant me another such opportunity to one day return to the wonderful people of Orthodox East Africa. \*To see more photographs from this mission trip, visit [www.doepa.org](http://www.doepa.org)\*

## St. Tikhon's Seminary Annual Fall Lecture Series

## Holy Cross Church Annual Fall Lecture Series

"Christ, the Eternal Tao"  
Hieromonk Damascene

September 21 Philadelphia  
7pm, St. Stephen's Cathedral

September 22 South Canaan  
7pm St. Tikhon's Seminary

"Honoring a Shared Heritage"  
Father Moses Berry

September 28 Philadelphia  
7pm, Assumption of the Holy Virgin

September 29 South Canaan  
7pm St. Tikhon's Seminary

"Orthodox Thinking on Other  
Religions"  
Fr. John Garvey

October 6 South Canaan  
7pm, St. Tikhon's Seminary

"Islam and Christianity"  
Archimandrite Daniel Byantoro

October 11 Philadelphia  
5pm, St. Stephen's Cathedral

October 13 South Canaan  
7pm, St. Tikhon's Seminary

October 14 Harrisburg  
7pm, Christ the Savior Church

October 18 Berwick  
2pm, Holy Annunciation Church

"A Walk through the Early  
Church"  
Father John Oliver

October 5 Williamsport  
7pm Holy Cross Church

"Streams of Living Water"  
Father John Reeves

October 12 Williamsport  
7pm Holy Cross Church

"The Angelic Life"  
Mother Christophora

October 19 Williamsport  
7pm Holy Cross Church

"From Byzantium to  
Brooklyn"  
Father Thomas Hopko

October 26 Williamsport  
7pm Holy Cross Church