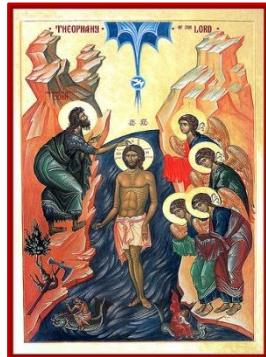


Sts. Peter & Paul Church Council News

February – March 2026

M.A. Mogilev, Publisher
Michael Peterson, Editor
Joanna Smith Chidlowsky, Editor Emerita
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www.stspproca.org

850 St. Olga Ct.
Santa Rosa, CA 95407
mishamish@email.com
(707) 584-4092



Priest's Corner

When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching the Jordan River, he said to his disciples: “Behold the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world” (John: 1,29). The “Lamb of God” comes to him to be baptized, to which John replies in amazement, “I have need to be baptized of Thee and comest Thou to me?” (Matt: 3,14). The Lord responded: “Suffer (Allow) it be so, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt: 3,15). Having received such a high calling from God Himself, John did, indeed, baptize the



Lord Who, immediately thereafter went into the desert to fast for 40 days. At the end of this fast, Satan himself dared to tempt the Son of God, the Son of Man and was, of course, rebuffed. Only then, did Our Lord re-enter the world to begin his salvific ministry.

This narrative begs the question: Why did the Son of God need to fast? Why did He,

throughout His earthly lifetime attend services in the synagogues? Why did the Son of Man have to tolerate temptation? Why did The Lord, Our God - Who is the very source of Divine Grace, allow Himself to be baptized? The answer is given to us by The Lord Himself. By doing these things He demonstrated to us that He is truly and completely human - with the one exception of sin - and, that He understands the needs and difficulties of our human nature. With this, He then shows us by His own example, what we need “to fulfill all righteousness.”

The grace of Baptism and the other Sacraments provided through Christ's Holy Church, is the very

source of life itself. Fasting helps us to rebuff temptation and strengthens our resolve to walk the path of righteousness. The culmination of Christ's earthly ministry takes place on the Cross, showing us the ultimate act of love, through which, His entire ministry and example are justified and sanctified by His most precious Blood. Having been given this path by Our Lord, God and Saviour, Who demonstrated to us what is necessary for us and what we need to follow it, let us take advantage of this year's Great Lent by following *His* example and truly commit ourselves to that path, so that we too, may “fulfill all righteousness” now, and for the rest of our lives.

*God Bless!
Fr. Alexander*



I wanted to thank everyone who came to our housewarming, and everyone in the parish for all the work they put in to making our move here possible. So much work was put into the house, into helping us unload the truck, into making sure we settled in with food. Everyone has been so kind and welcoming, and has made us feel not like welcome newcomers, but like we are truly at home, for which I and my family are deeply grateful.

*In Christ,
Priest Seth and Family*



This year, for the first time in the history of the parish, and possibly even of the other Russian parishes in the Bay Area, we blessed a body of water on the eve of Theophany. We chose to bless Lake Sonoma as it was the most accessible and the park rangers kindly told us we could. After the Divine Liturgy and Vespers on the



Eve of Theophany, the sisterhood kindly provided those wishing to go to the lake with to-go boxes of food. The priests and a number of parishioners drove to the lake and assembled in the parking lot. At around 1:45, a cross procession left the parking lot to go to a small beach. Priest Seth Davidenko served the Great Blessing of Waters and Protopriest Alexander Krassovsky assisted. The choir was led by Vera Peterson.

Upon the completion of the blessing, many of those present took the opportunity to bathe in the water, including Fr. Seth. This tradition is a very old Russian folk practice. Unfortunately, some people wrongly associate it with certain superstitions, but in reality, the practice most likely stems from the fact that in the prayers of blessing, the water is compared to the water of the Jordan and blessed by the immersion of the Holy Cross. For those in ancient times who had no way of traveling to the Holy Land, entering the blessed water on Theophany was the closest way to experience the grace of the Jordan. Of course, it is a great blessing to have this opportunity, and with it comes the responsibility of cherishing the Grace we receive.

In our first time doing this, there were close to 50 people that participated. All of them were quite happy with this opportunity and everyone seems to be looking forward to it again next year.

Congratulations to all those celebrating their Namesdays*:

Feb. 3 – Anthony Peneherrera
 Feb. 6 – Xenia Poluektov and Xenia Schettig
 Feb. 7 – Gregory Stez
 Feb. 9 – Ivan Stez
 Feb. 10 – Efrem White
 Feb. 16 – Metropolitan Nicholas, Anna Krassovsky, Anna Litvinenko, Simeon Collins
 Feb. 23 – Valentina Bertram
 Feb. 25 – Alexei Krassovsky, Alexei Sinitsky, and Alexei Spring



Feb. 27 – Archbishop Kyrill

March 4 - Theodora Dokos and Bozhidar Dokos

March 13 – Kira Chistiakoff, Kira McPhee and Kira Poluektov

March 17 - Daniel Judd

March 23 – Kalissa Chistiakoff

March 30 – Reader Alexei Khlopoff

**) Fr. Alexander asks, that you please notify him if we have missed anyone's namesdays in our lists. Thank you!*

God Grant Them All Many Years!

❖ ❖ ❖

Holy Tradition Supports the Proper Interpretation of the Bible

Many Evangelical protestants see Holy Tradition as standing in direct contrast to Scripture, as though Tradition is always relegated to “the traditions of men”. However, there are numerous references in the Bible to Holy Tradition. For example:

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).” It must be noted that in this instance, the oral word *preceded* the written word, hence becoming Holy Tradition.



In John 20:30-3, it is revealed, “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book”, and in John 21:25, we read, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written”. One of my personal favorite passages regarding Holy Tradition is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “So then, brothers and sisters,

stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter."

Holy Tradition is not apart from the Bible, but supports the proper interpretation of the Bible. Holy Tradition emanates from Christ Himself, and is expressed by the Apostles, the Holy Fathers, and the Church. The Fathers, in fact, are the very guardians of the Apostolic Tradition, for they, like the Apostles before them, are witnesses of a single Truth, which is the Truth of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Since Christ is one, unique, and indivisible, so also is the Church unique and indivisible. The Church is the incarnation of the incarnated God-man, Jesus Christ, and will continue through the ages, and even throughout all eternity.

*With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon*



Starosta's / Warden's Corner

Our dear Starosta/Warden, Paul Johnson, suffered a serious medical setback after vigil recently and ended up in the hospital for a number of days. Glory be to God; he has returned home and is recovering. We pray that he will regain his full strength and be back with us in church soon. Please keep him in your prayers. In the meantime, if there are any urgent issues or concerns, which need to be addressed, please contact Fr. Alexander at (707) 585-8330.



A Note to Our Stewards and Parishioners

By the time this newsletter is out, all of our stewards should have received their Donation Tax Receipts for 2025. In addition to the usual receipts, I have included some additional information for our stewards and for those parishioners who are not yet stewards of our church. I ask that you not delay at taking a moment to check the receipts for accuracy and to consider the information provided. It is my sincere hope and request that all of our parishioners sign up as stewards this year. Several of our existing stewards have already increased their stewardship pledges and we are

extremely grateful to all of you for the material support of our Parish.

God Bless!
Fr. Alexander



Sisterhood News

The main celebration in our church life in the month of January has always been the Nativity of our Lord. After a month of lenten lunches, our sisterhood prepared a big feast for this occasion. Lena Poluektov and Natasha Shikalov gracefully agreed to be the leaders for the festive Nativity lunch. As usual, many ladies contributed their favorite dishes - we had lots of meat offerings and a variety of delicious salads and fancy desserts. Thank you very much to all who generously participated in making this celebration truly special for everyone!



As we continued to celebrate Nativity on January 8th, Amanda Merriss and her daughters were responsible for the lunch. The girls did a fantastic job in the kitchen while their mom was singing in our choir. As a result, we all had another amazing festive lunch after the liturgy.

We are happy to report that we also continued our wonderful tradition of preparing and delivering beautiful Nativity gift baskets to the elderly and the sick and homebound members of our parish. A special big thank you goes to Natalia Sabelnik, who always donates many valuable items for the gift baskets, including chocolates, calendars, pens, warm socks and gloves, lip balms, lotions. The list goes on and on. Thank you very much, dear Natalia, for your kindness and thoughtfulness.

Anna Judd has been organizing and coordinating this ministry to the elderly and sick for the past fifteen plus years, and she is deeply grateful to everyone



who chooses to participate in this worthwhile endeavor. A great appreciation is due to Nina Williams, late George Franke's daughter, who, for many years, has been lovingly preparing charming handmade gifts for the baskets. Nina is a super creative person, and her creativity brightens our baskets with her unique handmade contributions. A huge thank you goes to the drivers who deliver the baskets to the homes of the elderly. This January the deliveries were made by Vera Zaro, Aliona Russie, Amanda Merriss and her family, Kira Poluektov, Maria Alalykina, and Matushka Sofia. Each gift basket had lots of goodies and a handwritten greeting card with the best wishes from our sisterhood. As always, they brought heartfelt joy to all the recipients. Thank you very much everyone who made this outreach a big success! God bless. Let's continue this tradition for Easter time.

Meanwhile, our sisterhood is preparing for the Maslenitsa - the Blini Lunch, which is scheduled for February 15th. Natasha Shikalov is in charge. Sharon Buot is organizing helpers. Please contact them if you are able to participate. And invite all your friends and neighbors to join us in this fun traditional celebration with lots of great food.

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Iveron Icon of the Holy Theotokos

On February 12 / 25, the church commemorates the Iveron Icon (Moscow) of the Most Holy Theotokos. This is a copy of the original icon from Mount Athos, which was requested by Archimandrite Nikon, who later became Patriarch Nikon, in 1640. The Moscow Iveron icon arrived in Moscow on October 13 / 26, 1648 and, like its predecessor, became quickly known for its miracles. A chapel was built for it at the Resurrection Gate near the Kremlin in 1669. Sadly,

the chapel was destroyed in 1917 by the Bolsheviks. After the fall of Communism, a new chapel was built and a copy of the icon resides at the chapel.

In 1982, Brother José Muñoz-Cortz traveled to Mount Athos and saw a copy of the Iveron Icon at a skete where several monks resided as iconographers. Brother José asked to acquire the icon, but was refused several times. Later, when Brother José was departing from the skete, the abbot approached him with a package. The abbot gave José the package telling him, "Joseph, the Mother of God wants to go with you." In the package was the icon José had wanted.

Three weeks later, in November 1982, at his apartment in Montreal, José woke up to what he called "an amazing fragrance." At first, he thought it was from a broken bottle of perfume. In the morning, he noticed the icon was covered in myrrh. For the next 15 years, Brother José traveled with the Montreal Iveron Icon to many parishes in North America and other countries, bringing the joy of the miracle icon to many people. Sadly, in October 1997, Brother José was martyred. The icon was not with him at the time and since then its whereabouts was never known.

In October 2007, a print copy of the Iveron icon, which was gifted to now, Father Nectarios, by his parish priest in Hawaii, began streaming myrrh. Like its Montreal predecessor, the Hawaiian Ieron Icon has traveled to many parishes in North America and other countries.

Here is the history of the Iveron Icon of the Holy Theotokos which resides on Mount Athos.

The original icon of Iveron leads us to the times of iconoclasm. During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (829-842), a cruel persecution of icons raged. Orthodox Christians were brutally tortured, and countless icons were destroyed. Few managed to save their lives and the most revered icons were ransomed for large sums of money.

In Nicea (now the Turkish city of Isnik), a rich, virtuous widow lived with her young son. The widow was praying in front of the icon in her house chapel one night when the iconoclasts came to abuse the holy image. One of the soldiers struck the icon with a sword. The blow fell into the image on the right cheek of the Most Pure Mother of God and immediately blood poured out of the wound. The frightened executioners hurried away, responding to the widow's pleas by agreeing to wait until the morning and promising the unthinkable amount of ransom for the icon.

At that time, many Orthodox Christians wanted to protect the icons from blasphemous desecration and did so by hiding them, lowering them into the waters of rivers and seas, and other such attempts to hand their fates over to the will of God. The Nicéan widow also handed her precious image of the Theotokos to the will of God. After the departure of the soldiers, she and her son went to the seashore and, with many prayers, parted with her icon by lowering it into the



water. As if responding to the loyalty of a courageous woman, the icon did not sink to the bottom, but becoming vertical and facing the shore, began to quickly move west until it disappeared from sight. The young man, heeding his mother's pleas, fled that night to Mount Athos where he remained there and later accepted monasticism. His story about a selfless mother, who undoubtedly suffered martyrdom from iconoclasts, and a detailed description of the extraordinary image of the Virgin, was preserved in the traditions of the Holy Mountain.

On Mount Athos, during the abbotship of St. Ephemios in the Georgian monastery of Iveron on Tuesday of Bright Week in the year 999, the monks were struck by a terrible and, at the same time awe inspiring phenomenon - on the surface of the sea they saw a pillar of fire emanating from an icon. Great excitement engulfed the monastery and with prayers many tried to take the icon by boat, but every time they drew near, it was moved further away. Then, after their return to shore, the fiery icon again approached the shore.

The confusion of the brethren grew, for a mysterious event such as this required some kind of action from them, but the action itself was unknown. This continued for several days, until they learned from Elder Gabriel the Georgian, who was struggling in a cave high above Iveron Monastery, that at night the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to him in a dream. Her will was revealed - the Mother of God wants to give Her image for protection and help to the monastery, and he must, without fear, walk through the waters and receive the icon.

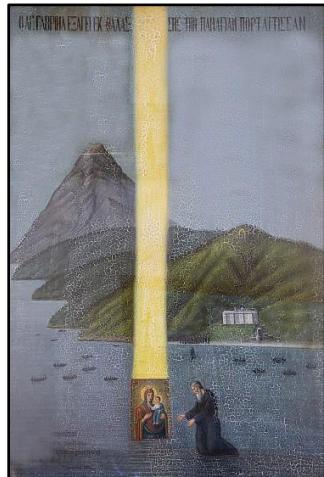
That night, to the chanting of monks standing on the shore, Elder Gabriel walked through the water and took the Holy Icon. The brethren served continuous prayers for three days and nights to this wondrous image of the Blessed Virgin, after which they reverently placed it in the altar of the cathedral Dormition Church. Their fear and awe increased even more when they recognized that this was the icon described by an already deceased monk - the son of a Nicéan widow. For, on the right cheek of the Most Pure Theotokos was clearly the tear from the sword and dried blood.

The next morning, after being placed in the Cathedral, the icon was missing from the altar and after a long search it was seen on the wall in a niche above the gates of the monastery. Not understanding what had happened, the monks carried her to the altar but again in the morning the icon was found above the gates. The same thing happened for the third time.

Again, the Mother of God spoke to the humble Elder Gabriel, appearing to him: "Declare to the brethren that they no longer tempt Me and leave My image at the gates. I do not want to be protected by you, but I want to protect you not only in the earthly, but also in the future life. May all who dwell in the virtuous life and fear of God trust in the mercy of my Son. And as long as my icon is at your abode, my mercy and grace will not be impoverished to you."

The icon forever remained at the gates, where the monks later built a temple in the name of the Most Holy Theotokos - "Chapel of the Gatekeeper". Since then, the Iveron icon is called "Portaitissa", that is, the Gatekeeper of Mount Athos. The Iveron Monastery, in its location, was the most convenient entrance to the peninsula and therefore the Iveron Portaitissa is the guardian of the entire Holy Mountain. There is an inscription in Greek on the original Iveron Icon riza: "Mother of God, Gatekeeper, Merciful."

After She reached her destination on Mount Athos in 999, there have been countless miracles that have occurred. As with all wonder-working icons, it was rewritten and copied by many around the world and many of those have also worked miracles.





The Iveron Icon is unique, it takes a special path that few icons can share in their histories, that it is a traveling icon. Its first journey to Mount Athos and to its final resting place on the gate carried by a Heavenly power. The copies of this Icon also journeyed, this time by human power, chosen individuals who had the ultimate responsibility. Few such copies were carried by horses throughout Moscow on a carriage fashioned as a chapel adorned with blue velvet on the walls, journeying at all hours to those in despair, healing the sick in soul and body.

Throughout its history, the same story unfolds about taking a journey and being the reason for lives changing for the better. The Iveron Montreal Icon and Iveron Hawaiian Icon are two of the most recent stories about traveling the world bringing everyone who prayed for Her intercessions healings of soul and body. This Icon is like one of the apostles, traveling the world preaching Christ and the True Faith. St. Ignatius Branchaninov expressed the Iveron Icon best when he was at the Caucasian cathedra: "The icon is the Apostle."

With Her love and mercy, the Mother of God seems to gather the world into a united spiritual organism, breaking the boundaries of cultures to bring the lost souls home to the True Faith.

Special note: Combined church dates are presented, they are written in the order of old calendar / new calendar.

Source: iveronmonastery.org

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Archangel Homeschool Academy

With the fluctuating California winter weather, it's almost difficult to remember how much time has passed since Nativity. In 2025 we held a studious pace

of learning and exploring. We appreciate the support from Igor Alexandrovich at Saints Peter and Paul for volunteering his time for several lessons. He introduced the students to the Russian alphabet and some basic Russian vocabulary. He also gave a demonstrative lesson in electrical systems. The students really having real, on the job lessons come to life, such as when Igor showed them that even a potato may process electromagnetic energy.

February is an exciting month with our biggest events yet this year. On February 8th we host an Open House and enrollment inquiry. On top of putting the finishing touches on the work they're excited to present, the students are also making the Sunday agape meal of spaghetti with homemade meatballs, Cesar salad and French baguette, and a variety of homemade desserts for those with any dietary restrictions.



Some of our homeschool students with their families and instructors.

Also extremely exciting is a field trip on February 11th to tour St. Tichon's Church, the church and orphanage St. John Maximovitch founded when he arrived in San Francisco. We will also visit Old Holy Virgin Cathedral, the church in which St. John served. It's following a series of lessons about St. John's life and many miracles. This will be a first time visit for most of the students, and their eyes especially lit up when they heard they get to see the chair where he used to fall asleep. We have no doubt it will be a most memorable field trip.

Amanda Merriss
asmerriss@protonmail.com

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Choir Notes

Our choir members come to rehearsal once a week in the evening, even though most balance jobs, families, and many other responsibilities. We are deeply grateful for the commitment and sacrifice each

member makes. Imagine a service without a choir – it truly would not be the same.



The choir arrives early and is often the last to leave, serving with prayer, dedication, and love. We are especially thankful for the sisterhood for their kindness in setting up a table for the choir on feast days. This gesture of recognition is truly appreciated and deeply felt.

It was a blessing to be part of a new tradition at the blessing of Lake Sonoma. Glory to God.

Let us continue to support, encourage, and uplift one another in this coming year.

—Vera Peterson
msvnp28@gmail.com
661-305-6234



Newsletter Submissions

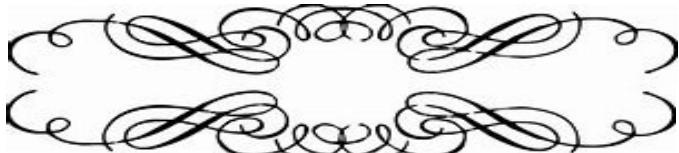
When submitting photos (original size, please) and other items for the newsletter, please email them to our editor, Misha Peterson, at msvnp28@gmail.com or you may text them to (661) 305-8364.

—Michael Mogilev, Publisher



■ Our Council Members ■

Rev. Alexander Krassovsky 707-585-8330
Rev. Seth Davidenko 707-396-6024
Fr. Deacon Athanasius Ferguson 707-812-4125
Paul Johnson, Warden 707-696-5566
Elisabeth Russie, Treasurer 415-328-1095
Natalya Shikaloff, Secretary 480-621-9976
Dimitrios Handelih 707-292-2842
Andrew Merriss 707-843-9818
Michael A. Mogilev 707-953-3636
John Reighard 707-235-8636



Orthodox Community Events

Celebrate Maslenitsa with Russian Blini!
Delicious traditional crepes to indulge in.

Join us for our Annual Blini Fundraiser!

Saints Peter and Paul Russian Orthodox Church
850 St. Olga Court, Santa Rosa, CA
off Stony Point Road 1/2 mile north of Todd Road

Sunday, February 15, 2026
11:30-3:00

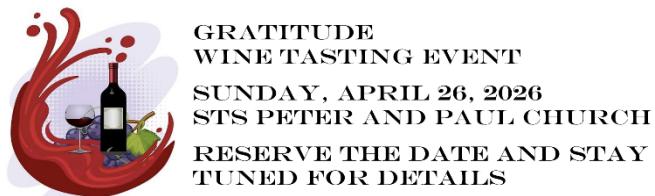


Delicious yeast-based crepes, a traditional pre-Lenten dish, served with melted butter and sour cream with optional side dishes of smoked salmon, herring and caviar.

* * * * *

For pre-orders of Paskha or Kulich, please contact
Nadia Stewart at (925) 708-1868

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- **Newsletter Sponsorship** If you would like to assist the publication of the newsletter you may specify this as part of your stewardship. A donation of \$300 would cover the expenses for one bi-monthly issue. Please include your family name and we will show our appreciation by citing your donation as a sponsorship for the particular issue(s) you are donating to. You may also make a donation in memory of a loved one. Deadlines for publications are mid-month prior to each issue's publication. The deadline for the April-May 2026 issue is March 15. Please contact our publisher, Michael Mogilev at 707-953-3636 or mishamish@email.com for donation details or you may specify your preferences through your sponsorship. Thank you, in advance for your support.

Parish Life





If you have any photos you would like to submit for future editions, please send them (original size), to our editor, Misha Peterson. See Newsletter Submissions.