

History of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church and Parishioners in Madison, Illinois 1900 - 2017

In 1900, the seeds of Orthodoxy, which were planted by immigrants from Austria-Hungary, Galacia, Carpatho-Russia and the Ukraine, took root and blossomed in the city of Madison, Illinois. Unfamiliar with the language, customs, and traditions of this new country, these immigrants turned to their one great resource of spiritual strength and comfort, their faith in God.

Having no church edifice at the time, the first regular place of worship was the home of Stephen and Martha Sawchak, located at 1017 Madison Avenue. It was in this home that a missionary priest, Father Stephanov, heard confessions and celebrated the first Divine Liturgy. Father Michael J. Potochy, the Orthodox priest in Streator, Illinois visited the faithful in Madison once a month to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.



In 1901, Archbishop Tikhon, Archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, visited the faithful in Madison, Illinois and granted the members permission to collect funds for the purpose of building a temple of worship in the city. In addition, Archbishop Tikhon donated the Holy Gospel, the church bell (which is still being used today), and made a monetary donation toward the building expenses. Archbishop Tikhon later became the Patriarch of Moscow and is now venerated by Orthodox Christians as Saint Tikhon of Moscow. Additional financial assistance was also received from the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Mutual Aid Society of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The original members of this Society

served as founding members of the church.

In 1902, this dedicated group of immigrants completed construction of a small wooden structure on Ewing Avenue. The iconostasis was built by hand using icons received from Galacia, Poland. Archbishop Tikhon empowered The Very Reverend Father John Kochuroff, the second priest of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Chicago, to bless the church. On February 16, 1902 this blessing took place according to the "Lesser

Rite of Consecration of a Temple". He donated an old processional Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan that is found today in the northeast corner of the church nave. On the reverse side of this icon is the following inscription: "*In blessing to the Madison parish from the Priest John Kochuroff*". Father Kochuroff eventually returned to his homeland (Russia) and in the beginning of the Russian Revolution was brutally martyred. He is now venerated by Orthodox Christians as St. John, New Martyr of Russia & Missionary to America.

In 1902, a tornado swept through the City of Madison, and moved the Church building approximately one foot off its foundation. The next year in 1903, the city and surrounding areas were flooded with five feet of water. When the water began to recede the church building moved back to its original place on the foundation.

The parish had a small cemetery near Wood River, Illinois some 15 miles. However, in 1924, due to the distance from the Church, the parish purchased eleven acres of property closer to the Church in Glen Carbon, Illinois. On May 30, 1925 His Eminence Archbishop Leonty dedicated the property for a parish cemetery. It continues today as a final resting place for the "departed faithful" of our parish, the "Church Triumphant".

Wanting to expose the youth of the parish to a portion of their ethnic heritage, the "Little Cossacks" dance group was organized in 1954. Over the years, the "Little Cossacks" shared its rich Russian dance heritage and provided enjoyment to all groups it entertained.

In 1958, realizing the parish community was growing and the church building was in need of extensive repairs, a building fund was established with the goal of building a new church with adequate space for the expanding Church School needs. The early 1960's, under the leadership of Reverend Hieromonk Theodosius (Lazor), the parish priest, the building program was accelerated. With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop John of Chicago and Minneapolis, the parish began in earnest the task of building a new church on the corner of 5th Street and Ewing Avenue just a few hundred feet from the old church.

On the 62nd Anniversary of the church, celebrated on September 23, 1962, ground was broken and blessed by His Eminence Archbishop John. A cross was planted on the property to mark the site of the new church. However, it was not until Pentecost Sunday, June 21, 1964, that ground was broken for construction.

On September 20, 1964, His Eminence Archbishop John assisted by the clergy of the St. Louis Area, celebrated the Hierarchical Liturgy. Immediately after Liturgy, a procession was made to the foundation of the new church for the "Rite of Blessing and Laying of the Cornerstone".

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, March 14, 1965, the parish met in the old church for the last service, a Service of Thanksgiving. As the faithful came to receive the blessing, each was given an article to carry as all joined in procession to the new church. After the blessing prayer in front of the church and the cutting of the ribbon, the doors were unlocked and the triumphant entry was made. After a small blessing service, the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the new church.

On Sunday, June 6, 1965, the Holy Altar was consecrated and the church dedicated and anointed with Holy Chrism by His Eminence Archbishop John. A holy relic of St. John the Russian, the New Confessor, was placed in the new marble Altar table. The Right Reverend Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary was guest speaker for the occasion.

On September 10, 1972 just seven years after the consecration of the "new Temple", the parish once again gathered to celebrate the "burning of the Church mortgage" and the groundbreaking for the construction of a new rectory. The parish was honored to have in attendance for this event His Beatitude Metropolitan Ireney, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, His Eminence Archbishop John and also His Grace Bishop Theodosius, Bishop of Pittsburgh and West Virginia. It had just been seven short years since His Grace Bishop Theodosius (our parish priest in 1965) had served the first Divine Liturgy at this Altar.



Once again our parish was blessed in a special way as it celebrated its 75th Anniversary. His Eminence Archbishop John, and His Grace Bishop Theodosius con-celebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy along with our Parish Priest, V. Reverend Vladimir Lecko. During this Liturgy, Deacon Joseph Hirsch of Kansas City

was ordained to the Holy Priesthood by Archbishop John. It was our humble privilege to be a part of the beginning of this progress.

In August, 1979, Reverend Thomas Succarotte was assigned to serve the Parish, which he served diligently and faithfully until January, 2011 for over 32 years. "Father Tom" reposed in the Lord on August 8, 2015. Reverend Nicholas Finley, a native St. Louisan and member of St. Michael the Archangel Church in St. Louis, MO

was assigned by His Eminence, Archbishop Job to serve the Church, helping our parishioners continue in their spiritual journey.

As the Parish approaches its 117th Anniversary, we continue to pray and work together to spread the word of Orthodoxy. We, like those who came before us, have our faith in God and His holy Church to guide us through our struggles and hardships.