

Priests of the St. Louis Area

Part 1 of 2

The St. Louis region was blessed to have had many priests that served the parishes of our region over the years and who provided inspiration, spiritual guidance and leadership to Orthodox Christians in our area. Here is Part I of a two part series of articles with brief descriptions of several of those priests.

RT. REVEREND JOHN TERTICHNY **St. Michael's Orthodox Church, St. Louis, MO**

Over the years, St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church had been serviced by a number of clergy since it's founding in 1909. However, one of the priests, Father John Tertichny, stands out in the life of St. Michael's as the longest serving clergy from 1932 to 1974 – a span of 42 years.



Father John was born in 1891 in Piatigory, Russia and received his education from the School of Music and the Theological Seminary in Kiev, graduating in 1912. In 1913 he came to the United States and became an energetic Orthodox church leader, starting as choir director and teacher at St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland where he met and married his wife, Mary Jemma, in 1915.

Ordained a deacon in 1915 and a priest the following year in Montreal, Father John was first assigned to Sydney, Nova Scotia to help organize a parish and build a church there. It was here in Sydney, Nova Scotia that their daughter Olga (Fedak), was born.

In 1918 he was sent to Herkimer, NY where he organized plans for construction of a new church building. Two years later, he went to Grand Rapids, MI to organize another parish and build a church school. It was here in Grand Rapids that their son, Boris, was born.

Father John was transferred to Benld, IL in 1927 where he served for 5 years before coming to St. Michael's in St. Louis in 1932. He served as dean of the St. Louis Deanery, which covered much of the Missouri-Illinois area from 1931 until his retirement. A highlight of his priesthood was the awarding of the mitre in 1963 at the age of 72. At that time, he was only one of four mitred archpriests in the United States.

Father John kept the church going through some very difficult years – the Great Depression, and World War II – where very often there were only women and older men to keep the parish running. Once the war ended, improvements began on the church building itself – pews were installed, a gas furnace replaced the pot belly stove – new roof and an enclosed belfry were added along with a crystal chandelier from Greece (which is still in the church today) – that was made possible by a generous donor. The Ladies Sodality and Men’s Club were established and the Church school had its beginning in 1951 – reaching an enrollment of over 60 students by 1958.



During the late 60’s, Father John was instrumental in guiding St. Michael’s in using more English during the services. Up to this point services had all been in Church Slavonic, and also in moving the parish toward the New Calendar celebration of feasts. Although not everyone agreed with these “innovative” ways of thinking, Father John knew this was an important step in keeping the future generations in the church.

The early 70’s saw the start of an extensive Byzantine icon project. Dimitri Zonia, a local iconographer and former parishioner who attended St. Michael’s during his youth, was commissioned to do the icons. Many of the icons were completed and blessed by Archbishop John in 1972 and again, in 1973 by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Ireney.

Father John retired in 1974 at the age of 83, and passed away on January 3, 1980 at the age of 88.

METROPOLITAN THEODOSIUS (LAZOR)
Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church, Madison, IL

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius (Lazor) was born in Canonsburg, PA in 1933 to immigrant parents from Galicia, in what is today the southeastern corner of Poland. After completing undergraduate studies at Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, PA, he enrolled in Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York, from which he received a Master of Divinity degree in 1960. He spent the next year pursuing additional studies at the Ecumenical Institute in

Bossey, Switzerland, touring the Holy Land, and visiting Christian centers throughout Europe and the Middle East.

Upon returning to the US in 1961, he took monastic vows and was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood. From 1961 through 1966, he served as rector of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church, Madison, IL and as an assistant military chaplain at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri.

Upon Reverend Hieromonk Theodosius' arrival in Madison, he realized quickly that the community of faithful Orthodox had outgrown the existing church. He was instrumental in accelerating the program to erect a new church. On September 23, 1962 a cross was planted at the site of the new church and ground breaking took place on June 21, 1964. On Sunday, March 14, 1965, just four years after Father Theodosius' arrival to Madison, the first liturgy was served in the new church. With his faith and guidance, the faithful of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church had accomplished what was once just a dream.



While in Madison, Father Theodosius worked closely with the parish ladies group, who became the Society of the Myrrhbearing Women; the parish youth; and his fellow Orthodox clergy in the area, who worked to bring Orthodox of various ethnic backgrounds in the St. Louis region for pan-Orthodox services and activities. There are many fond memories of working with Father Theodosius and how his enthusiasm and dedication to the Faith inspired parishioners and others who interacted with him.



In 1967, he was elected and consecrated to the episcopacy as Auxiliary to the Metropolitan and Bishop of Washington DC and as administrator of the Diocese of Alaska. On November 17, 1967, the Great Council of Bishops elected him as the diocesan Bishop of Sitka and Alaska.

In 1970, Bishop Theodosius traveled to Moscow to receive the Tomos, or proclamation, of Autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1972, he was reassigned by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America to the

Diocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania. On October 25, 1977 he was elected Metropolitan of All America and Canada during the 5th All-American Council in Montreal, Quebec.

During his tenure as Bishop, Archbishop and Metropolitan, he made many visits back to his first parish in Madison, IL for many celebrations the parish hosted. There are still parishioners at the church that remember his priesthood in Madison and give thanks to God for his service to the parish and the Orthodox Church in America. *Eis polla eti despota!*

V. REVEREND VLADIMIR LECKO **Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church, Madison, IL**

In the early years of his life, Father Vladimir Lecko was a trained professional in music and photography, detailed oriented and very dedicated to his creative arts of photography and music. Later, as a priest, he was no less committed to Christ and in the protection and salvation of his entrusted flock of parishioners. Walter or V. Reverend Vladimir was born in Terryville, CT on May 22, 1929 and served as a professional photographer, eventually becoming a partner in a photography studio. With the call of service to his country, he enlisted in the Air Force and served for nine years, using his music talents as a musician in the Air Force Band while serving in Texas, Illinois and Alaska. It was after the Air Force that Father Vladimir answered his true calling and enrolled at St. Tikhon's Seminary.



Father Vladimir graduated from St. Tikhon's Seminary in 1963 and served as full time choir director at St. John the Baptist Church in Edwardsville, PA while attending Wilkes University, where he graduated in 1969 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology.

Father Lecko's first assignment as a parish priest was the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church in Madison, Illinois. Father served in Madison for almost ten years and had a profound impact on the parish faithful.

Besides Father's low key approach to solving problems, Father instilled hope and encouraged many young parishioners to grasp the opportunity before them, often by giving guidance and direction. He was very



active with the youth, encouraging the Cossack Dancers and starting a Balalaika Orchestra that became the “toast of the town”, performing all over the bi-state area and even traveling to other parts of the United States for performances. Father was very involved with the Madison Junior “R” Club, with projects, sports and educational programs. Father was always available, working late into the night on projects with parishioners, whether it be planning a golf tournament or working with a troubled parishioner. The Church always came before everything else in his life.

During his years in Madison, Father Vladimir served as Dean of the St. Louis Deanery and was active in the International Folklore Federation and the Orthodox Clergy Association of St. Louis. Father also served as Spiritual Advisor for the Midwest District of the F.R.O.C. and was active with the Junior Department of the F.R.O.C. Sadly, for many at the Nativity of the Virgin Mary parish, Father was reassigned to St. Mary’s Cathedral in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1979 where he served until 1996. At that time, Father semi-retired but continued serving St. Andrew’s Mission in Minocqua, Wisconsin until 2012 when it became a chapel where he still serves today.



Father Vladimir and Matushka Virginia have been married for 65 years and have one son, Peter, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.