

THE GOOD NEWS

Saint Paul's Greek Orthodox Church - Monthly Bulletin

"I am not ashamed of the Good News because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (*Romans 1:16*)

July, 2017

Volume 108 | Issue 188

There is nothing on earth
higher, greater or more holy
than the Divine Liturgy;
nothing more solemn,
nothing more life-giving.



~ *St. John of Kronstadt*

WORSHIP SERVICES

Sundays

Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am



Special Services in July

Wednesday, July 12th

St. Paisios the Athonite
Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am



Saturday, July 15th

St. Kyrikos the Martyr
Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am

*The veneration of the
relic of St. Kyrikos at
11:15am*



Thursday, July 20th

Elijah the Prophet
St. Maria of Paris
Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am



Wednesday, July 26th

St. Paraskeve the Martyr
Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am



Thursday, July 27th

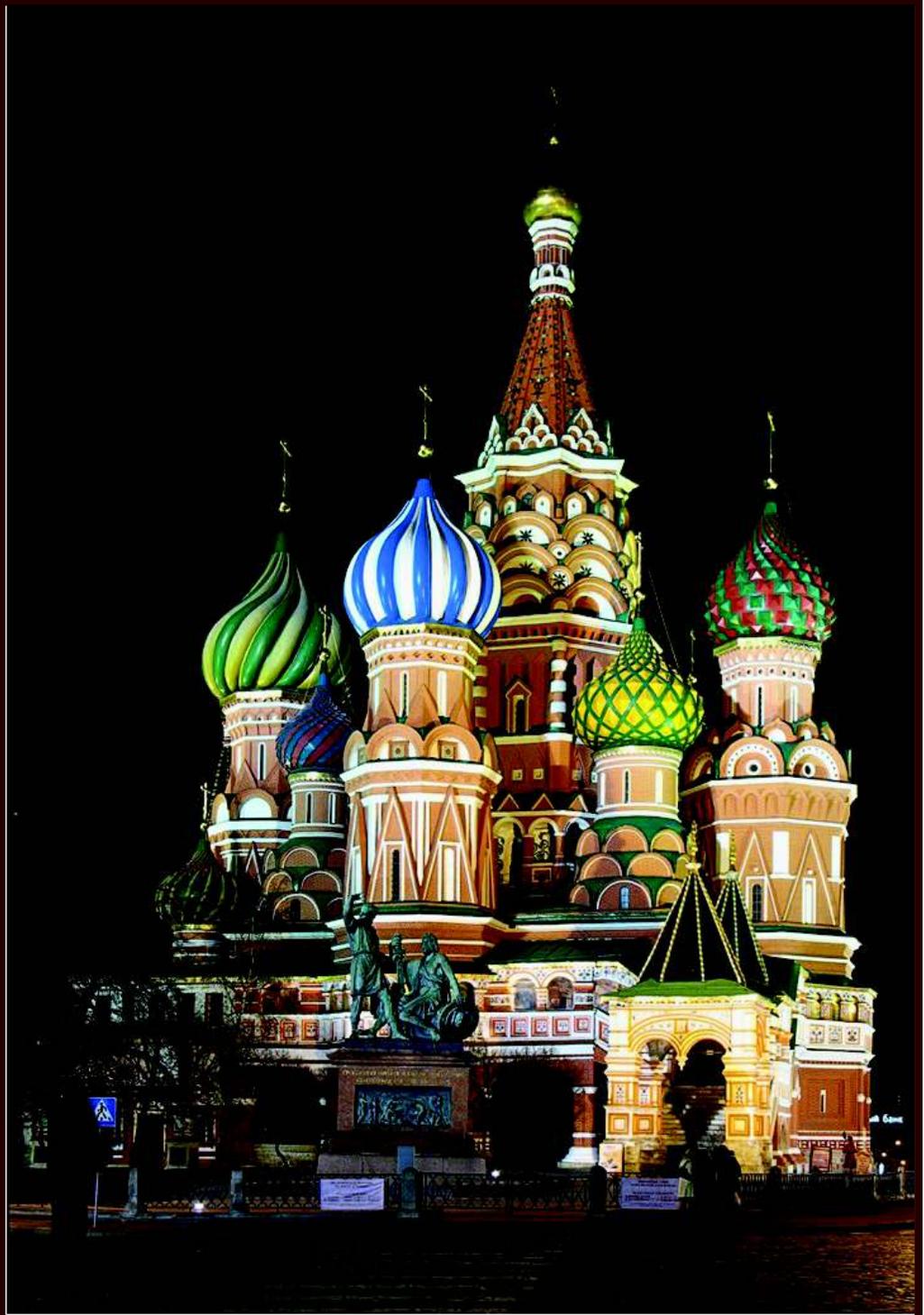
St. Panteleimon
Morning Prayer 9am
Divine Liturgy 10am

*The veneration of the
relic of St. Panteleimon
at 11:15 am*

Saint Paul's Greek Orthodox Church

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Father Steven Tschlis, Pastor — Father Theofanis J. Degaitas, Assistant Priest
Deacon Daniel Cunningham, Parish Deacon - Dean Langis, Pastoral Assistant
Christian Siskos, Youth Director—Marina Kookootsedes, Office Administrator
Joanne Petas, Administrative Assistant — Denise Oller, Administrative Assistant



A PILGRIMAGE—TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Why a Pilgrimage?

A Pilgrimage is spiritual travel of the heart, exposing one to special places of religious significance. The traveler is a "pilgrim," and the experience enriches their life forever, touching their heart to grow in their faith. Pilgrimages are transformational, inspirational journeys where one experiences sacred sites including churches, monasteries and places where saints lived or died, and locations where miracles were performed or witnessed. Pilgrims gain spiritual enlightenment they can put into practice in their everyday lives with a better knowledge of God.

St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church pilgrimage to Russia included three priests, Father Steve Tschlis, Father Harry Pappas and Father Ilya Gotlinsky, and Pastoral Assistant Dean Langis. Our pilgrims numbered 32 followers of Christ, each with their own memories of our journey together.

Barbara & Wayne House

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: The Holy Land and Egypt 2011; and now Russia 2017



Biggest wow:

"In the wake of experiencing 70 years of religious annihilation under Communist rule, the great faith and piety found in the Russian citizenry left me in awe more than once. I was moved to witness many deep in prayer with foreheads pressed to icons or even the exterior walls of a closed or crowded church. Built in seven years from over 800,000 small donors and containing mosaic work of 225 amateurs and volunteers, I was amazed at the architecture and prayerful iconography of The Church of the Protection of the Theotokos at Yasenevo. A line five to ten hours in duration extended daily outside Christ Our Savior Cathedral to venerate the relics of St. Nicholas. Most notable perhaps was the persistence and dedication required to turn the secret Butovo Killing Fields into a national shrine commemorating the 20,000 executed including more than 300 New Martyrs for Christ."

Biggest take away:

"Saints are not just people of 2000 years ago or even hundreds of years ago. There are many 'modern' saints such as St. John of Kronstadt (1829-1908), St. Elizabeth (1864-1918), and like Fr. Alexander Men (1935-1990), not yet officially canonized. Those people who gave their lives to serve others and follow Christ to the end."

Mark Hudoff

Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

"Father Steve, dressed in his black robes, and I were walking down a street away from the rest of the group. While we were talking, I noticed a small boy riding his bike on the opposite side of the street. The boy, maybe 9 or 10 years old, had the look of a little rascal. All of a sudden he hung a somewhat unsafe "u-turn" across the street and pedaled up right behind us. He put his bike down and was talking to us in Russian. We turned and he came up to Father Steve and bowed his head. Father Steve blessed the boy. He smiled a big smile and said something in Russian, got on his bike and raced off. I was simply blown away by this act of deep reverence for Orthodoxy. In retrospect, I simply cannot imagine this happening anywhere but Russia!"





Linda Hewitt

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: Greece and Rome, 2005; the Holy Land and Egypt 2011; Turkey and Patmos, 2013; and now Russia 2017.

"There were many memories I will be mulling over for months: the churches, the relics of the saints venerated, the camaraderie of our group, how many times we ate beef stroganoff with potatoes. But the biggest is simply Mother Russia. Russia is so different than I expected it to be. It is green and lush, with tall trees and tulips everywhere. There are enormous Orthodox church domes everywhere you look in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, and yes, they are gilded in gold! There is no mistaking them for any other type of structure. There are countless Russians attending church, venerating icons, bringing their children to services, and lighting candles. No one was expensively dressed, but their devotion to Orthodoxy was impressive. Crowds lined up in the rain to venerate the relics of St. Nicholas in Moscow, standing in line for hours. The people were friendly, too, from the young taxicab driver practicing his English to the young girls working in the shops to the maids in the hotels and the waiters in the restaurants. As a country, the United States may be at odds with the Kremlin, but the Russian people were friendly and helpful throughout our trip. I hope I can return to Russia to see more."



Georgia Theodor

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: Turkey and Patmos 2013; and now Russia 2017

"After seeing the all the churches & all the monasteries, the most powerful impact for me was seeing all the people in line - in cold & rainy weather no less - to venerate the relics of St. Nicholas at the Cathedral of Christ our Savior. The police were there for crowd control! 8 hours - 8 hours! Do any of us have faith like that? I'm sure I don't. You can have the most exquisite church or monastery but without the faithful it is merely a shell.

In sad contrast, I remember our pilgrimage to Turkey and experiencing churches as museums or desecrated but somehow, still remaining as mute witnesses to the faith."



Joyce Kechian

Pilgrimage: Russia, 2017

"I have a new understanding of the saints. They are human beings that have an incredible will to help others in every way possible and do so. St. John Kronstadt is an example along with St. Elizabeth the New Martyr. I found these two saints to be people of unbelievable mercy and love. I now have these two saints in my home (the very first saint icons other than the Virgin Mary and the Lord Jesus) in my home and pray to them.

I also have a new outlook on the trials and tribulations of the Russian people and how they were abused, and killed, and still they come to their beautiful churches with their children and pray. They truly are resilient and inspirational to me.

I loved being on this journey with the people of St. Paul with whom I have come to know more deeply. I am so truly happy and blessed to be among all the Jesus loving folks at St. Paul's! Walking into some of the Churches in Russia—they were so beautiful—brought tears to my eyes."



Melinda Kartsonis

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: Holy Land and Egypt 2011; Turkey and Patmos 2013; and now Russia 2017

"How does one sum up a 12-day journey and capsulize it in small McNugget's of information? Not easy for any of us... My Top 5 are:

1. Voices of angels.

In one of the small chapels within Moscow's St. Basil's Cathedral, four men began singing A Capella spiritual hymns in Russian. Their voices, reverberating throughout the small chapel, were beautiful, indescribable, a "pinch me" moment. Truly, they were voices of angels. I did not understand a single word yet I understood everything.

2. Many hands make work light.

The Church of the Protection of the Theotokos at Yasenevo, which was consecrated only two years earlier, was built by the donations of 800,000 donors. (No major donors, only individuals and pious organizations – people donating what they could afford including rings, jewelry, art, etc.). So even though its beauty is rich, it was truly built by those in poverty and in record time, no less. It's overwhelming beauty and the meaning behind it brought tears to my eyes.

3. Somber. Heartbreaking Reality of Stalin's Great Terror

More than 20,000 political prisoners deemed "enemies of the people" by Stalin during his Great Terror from August 1937-October 1938 were killed in mass executions at The Butovo Killing Fields, many being bishops, priests monks and nuns. In graves 17 feet deep, people were shot, layered in dirt, clothes, and then more bodies. There was a chart that showed how many people were killed each month. The green grass in this field is peppered with many trees with unusual multiple trunks. The shape and oddity of these trunks is found nowhere else – I kept thinking they were, are, and continue to be fertilized by all these innocent people.

4. Love in our hearts and Tsars in our eyes.

The grandeur and beauty of the palaces, architecture, and the art – works from Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Raphael, and others were jaw dropping incredible. Hitler was set out to destroy everything and the Russian's were able to hide many important pieces which otherwise would have been lost forever.

5. All pray and no play? No way!

*Sharing a pilgrimage experience deepens not only our relationships with God, but with each other. I cherish my St. Paul's friends, and we squeezed in plenty of fun & laughter along the way. To my cohorts in "wodka tasting," – Dennis Thomas and Wayne House – **Nostrovial**! (Along with all the other good sports that had a shot, or two). To my Fashion Picks – Maria O'Malley, Jeri Konopisos, Helen Louis, Georgia Theodor and Andrea Britigan – way to rock it. To all the ladies – our #Babushka Brigade – we made being a Glamour Don't fun! To my fellow lovers of candy – Joanne Petas, Dorothea Love – isn't it amazing how Red Vines, See's, and Peanut M&M's taste heavenly so far away from home? To my tablemates, always fabulous lunch & dinner conversation with sharing our deep daily experiences, along with many laughs.*

To Father Ilya – thank you for teaching me my new line: "I am so humble—and proud of it."





Dorothea Love

Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

A few memories...from the heart:

A father gently lifting his young child to venerate the many icons that lined the walls and alcoves of the church.

A very elderly woman standing during the entire Liturgy, prostrating herself at the appropriate moments and clearly in communion with our Savior.

The angelic voices of the Acapella choirs.

The exquisite architectural beauty of palaces, cathedrals and churches. The iconography and the art, music and dance of Russia.

Standing in one of the many "killing fields" of Russia; knowing that between the start of WWI and the death of Stalin 39 years later, at least 60 million men, women and children, including bishops and priests, monks and nuns, were executed, perished in the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution or starved to death. And yet the faith survived!

Truly a land of many contrasts. Lord have mercy!



Helen Louis

Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

"Message to my fellow Pilgrims: Even though we may have experienced our pilgrimage in different ways, I now share a more special relationship with everyone of you that made this journey to Russia. I am thankful to have shared this with you.

On a personal level, I now see the Russian people – and specifically Russian Orthodox Christians– from a totally different perspective than I had in the past. As a people – not a government – they have persevered through revolution, persecution and atrocities I was not aware of. Spiritually, they are a people who "rose like the Phoenix from the ashes" while holding onto their faith, even in secret and in threat of cruel death, which many in fact endured. Magnificent Churches, once pillaged or destroyed, have been rebuilt to the glory of God by pious and devout believers in Christ. I am humbled by them. To learn more about saints like St. John of Kronstadt and the New Martyrs of the faith– so many from Russia – like St. Elizabeth of Moscow and the countless New Martyrs from the "Killing Fields" of Stalin's Russia - has made me question my own strength of faith. To have experienced Holy Russia, even to a small extent, is to have been enlightened as an Orthodox Christian."



Denise Leara

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: Greece and Rome 2005; and now Russia 2017

"My pilgrimage to Russia convicted me in regards to my thankfulness for my religion and faith. I have never seen such piety and faith in the faces of people of all ages and gender, especially at the shrine of St. Xenia and when we venerated the relics of St. Nicholas at the Cathedral of Christ our Savior. To know what they have endured for so many years humbles me. I am so thankful to Father Steve and Father Ilya for leading us and praying with us. I am also most thankful to have shared this with the special group of pilgrims from my St. Paul's family."

Jeri & Ted Konopisos
Pilgrimage: Russia, 2017

Biggest wow:

The reverence and devotion of the Russian people. The thousands upon thousands of pilgrims coming to the Christ the Savior Cathedral and waiting in line for 8-10 hours to reverence the holy relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. The relics are on loan with permission from Pope Francis and it is the first



time the relics have left Bari, Italy where they have been since the eleventh century. The surprising fact of seeing so many young and middle aged parishioners. (I expected the majority to be elderly.) Witnessing mothers and children approach Fr. Steve for blessings!

The tragic history of the Russian church and yet the awe-inspiring faith that kept the church alive through many terrorizing decades, even centuries

Biggest take away:

Probably the biggest for me was learning more about our holy icons and the saints of Russia. I was especially moved by: The icon of the Holy Trinity also known as the "Hospitality of Abraham" - Let us love one another, so that with one mind we may confess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided. The most famous icon of the Trinity painted by St. Andrei Rublev for the iconostasis of the Holy Trinity Monastery in 1425 and now at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow; and the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God - Our tradition calls it an "Eleousa" icon, depicting the tenderness between the Christ Child and His mother, the Holy Theotokos.

And all the saints of Russia, especially St. John of Kronstadt, a modern day saint (1829-1908) and known as a man of deep prayer, a healer, someone gifted with spiritual discernment and prophecy; but also St. Basil the Blessed, St. Xenia, St. Elizabeth the New martyr, St. Tikhon of Moscow, St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Innocent of Alaska...

It was a joy to share this experience with our parish brothers and sisters and we have extraordinary appreciation for the spiritual journey provided by Fr. Steve, our new and dear friend, Father Ilya Gotlinsky, Father Harry Pappas and Dean Langis.

Ted Konopisos

"Our first Liturgy in St. Petersburg at the Cathedral of the last tsar, celebrating the Ascension of Christ into Heaven, when we were sharing the greeting of peace, I was approached by three Russians and given the Kiss of Peace by each of them (3 times on each cheek). This brought tears to my eyes as we were celebrating the Eucharist in a beautiful Russian Orthodox Church that was used by the Communists as a dairy for over 50 years."



Dennis & Maria O'Malley Thomas

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: The Holy Land and Egypt 2011; and now Russia 2017

"Every day brought a new and moving experience. There were so many emotional experiences. But the most emotional, and heart moving experience for me was being anointed with holy oil by Father Harry at St. Xenia's tomb. We were anointed after Father Steve, Father Harry, Father Ilya and all of us sang a service for St. Xenia. Then, after our group had been blessed and anointed by Father Harry, several Russian Orthodox people followed our group and were also anointed. They kissed the cup of oil and Father Harry's hand after being blessed. It was so emotional to see Christian brothers and sisters, that are over 5000 miles away from us, who heard the service and hymns in English, join us in venerating Saint Xenia. I will never forget this experience."

Maria O'Malley Thomas

"The first evening in Saint Petersburg, Father Ilya took a small group of us for a walk after dinner. After 15 to 20 minutes, we walked past a large building that is part of a Naval Academy and Orthodox music, possibly chanting, was heard from a small outdoor speaker. Inside a side entrance we found a tiny church about the size of the narthex at our Saint Paul's in Irvine. The church is named after Saint Spyridon. A few days later, Dennis and I were walking back from the Hermitage and passed this church again. We went in and purchased a beautiful icon of Saint Spyridon. The Priest, Father Vasile, was present. In Russian and broken English, he asked us where we were from. We told him that we were Greek Orthodox visiting from California. A few Russian parishioners were also present and were happy to hear this. Father Vasile blessed us and the icon. The love that projected from Father Vasile brought Dennis and I to tears."



"The life in Christ is always a journey of 'getting larger'. Left to my natural devices, I resist this and want to continue as I am. A pilgrimage trip then, is just a more focused kind of life's journey, like light being gathered by a magnifying glass. For my wife, Suma, and I, this movement towards larger life came in a variety of ways, from being able to get to know our fellow parishioners better, interactions with priests who were new to us (Fr. Harry Pappas & Fr. Ilya Gotlinsky), experiencing stunning works of Orthodox architecture and Iconography, and the icons/faces of fellow Orthodox Christians that we would never have encountered otherwise, also pursuing a life in CHRIST, half a world away."

Duncan & Suma Simcoe

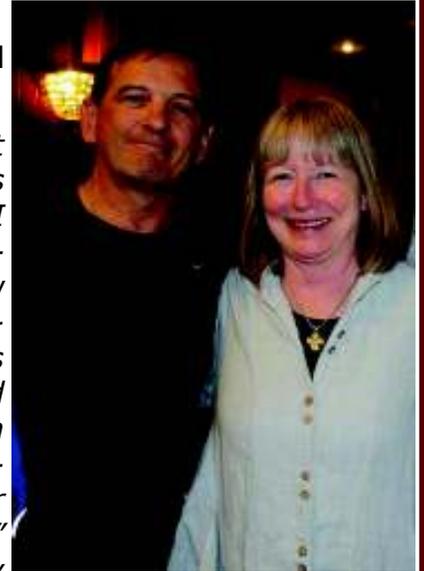
Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

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Jennifer & Robert Schipsi

Previous St. Paul's Pilgrimages: The Holy Land and Egypt 2011; and now Russia 2017

"For me, one of the most moving parts of our pilgrimage came at the Donskoy Monastery. As I entered the Winter Church, my eyes filled with tears. Why? I knew nothing about where I was. Yes, I was overwhelmed by the beauty, but it was more than that. Somehow this holy sacred place spoke to me. St Tikhon of Moscow (Patriarch of Moscow) was held under house arrest on the Monastery grounds. Though he was not allowed to speak, he gave his blessing to the faithful from the balcony where he lived. He died (many believe due to poisoning) and is buried in the Winter Church at the Monastery. We were very blessed to have been able to venerate his relics. Also at the Monastery is the gravesite of Alexander Solzhenitsyn (the author of "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" and "The Gulag Archipelago"). He, too, was allegedly poisoned by the KGB in 1971 but survived. Unfortunately, due to damage from a freak storm, we were unable to pray a Trisagion at his graveside. Both of their lives took place during times of bloodshed, famine, forced labor and mass killings. Can you imagine the terror, fear and horror that everyone must have felt? The suppression of faith, the inhumanity and the decay of moral values? All at the hands of the Communist regime. Regarding atheism, Alexander Solzhenitsyn repeated what he had been told as a child by the elders in his village: "Men have forgotten God, that's why all this has happened."



Zoila Hernandez

Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

"My impression was that Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church were devastated by communism. We heard about so much devastation, churches that were demolished or used for other purposes (a dairy and a museum, for example). Everything, the buildings (apartment buildings), appeared so old to me. In St. Petersburg, Fr. Steve would approach me at all the churches to ask me what I thought of their western baroque style. I always responded, "I feel at home—it's like being in an old Roman Catholic Church." He always smiled.

My most impressionable quote was from Fr. Ilya when he quoted the early Christian writer, Tertullian, several times saying, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." He was referring that the rebirth of the Russian Orthodox Church was coming about through the blood shed by all the Russian martyrs. I also saw so much hope flourishing in the Russian Orthodox church. Churches were being returned by the government to be used again for religious purposes. We were told there were 20,000+ new churches. We met a young seminarian, Constantine, and he said his seminary had 200+ seminarians and the larger seminary in the region had over 800. I was especially moved when we witnessed thousands of people going to venerate the relics of St. Nicholas at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. I was thinking how only a few years ago they could not openly express their love of the church or saints. I was so happy Pope Francis made this possible and we were able to witness this and venerate the relics. I was very emotionally affected at the Killing Fields. The reality of what happened in Russia was impressed there. I felt overwhelmed by this experience. I haven't stopped praying daily for all the Russians martyred for political or religious beliefs.

On a personal note, I expressed to Father Ilya and a few others about Our Lady of Fatima. For me it feels like Our Lady is playing a major role in bringing the faithful back to the church. I came on this pilgrimage instead of going to Fatima for the 100th anniversary."



Dave & Diane Miller

Pilgrimage: Russia 2017

"Russians appear to be no different than Americans, just God fearing people. Their deep-seated religious beliefs and faith have enabled them to survive centuries of adversity, cruelty, suppression, persecution, and wars. These traits remain strong today. There is a deep sense of gratitude and loyalty to those who have shaped Russia beginning with Jesus and including Constantine forward. Deep faith in God helped the Russians endure the dark ages of Lenin and Stalin.

Takeaways:

1. The strength of the people is reflected in the faith of the people. I am weak!!!
2. When darkness surrounds you.... look to God

help you get through these times not eliminate these challenges.

3, Be a verb, not a noun for your faith. A noun alone is an incomplete sentence. A verb gives meaning and denotes action

4. Give away things of real value: start with LOVE.

5. Never stop learning... travel, education, reading, and doing...you will experience surprises unlimited."

Diane Miller

"I was spiritually uplifted with the number of Orthodox cathedrals and monasteries in both St. Petersburg and Moscow. What a surprise to see the overwhelmingly beautiful houses of worship built by the Russian people for the purpose of glorifying God. And throughout our pilgrimage, I noticed a constant flow of Orthodox Russian citizens worshiping God and venerating the martyrs. A poignant moment of Russian faith comes to mind when I exited to the plaza of The Church of the Protection of Theotokos at Yasenevo. There I saw two Russian women come up to Father Steve and ask for a blessing. Imagine people a world apart coming together in the Name of God. That encounter was after experiencing the beauty and splendor of that newly constructed cathedral made possible by the donations of 800,000 pious ordinary Russian people. These same fervent and determined people, students and amateur volunteers, were trained to painstakingly install the glorious wall mosaics icons and mosaic floors. Truly a testimony expressing their spiritual need and a deep faith."



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Gratitude to our Three Fathers and Dean Langis:

Heaps of gratitude to Father Steve: your vision in developing and implementing these special pilgrimages for our parish is so appreciated beyond what words can say. You are responsible for us growing deeper in our walk with God in a huge and magnificent way. To Father Harry Pappas, your words of wisdom, sharing of your knowledge, and joining us in this journey was a true blessing. To Pastoral Assistant Dean Langis, your curiosity and intelligent questions stirred many discussions – you asked questions that sparked truly interesting topics. And to Father Ilya Gotlinsky, your expertise and contacts made this pilgrimage a once-in-a-lifetime journey for us. **Thank you!**

