

The Cost of Filling Up the Tank

You don't need a church newsletter to tell you that the price of gasoline has skyrocketed. We are all taking a second look at each and every trip that we make, from forays to the grocery store to more ambitious outings. More than that, we are driving differently: accelerations are made with care, pretending that proverbial egg is under the pedal. We shop around—without driving too much—for our car's fuel. Gas has gone from a mundane, everyday necessity that we hardly consider to something that shapes our basic behaviors and lifestyle. It's a basic need, and now it is costly.

At [Pentecost](#), celebrated this upcoming Memorial Day weekend, we celebrate and embrace a Reality that, like gas in our cars, makes our spiritual lives "go:" the Holy Spirit. If cars need gas to help us fulfill our various callings and desires, Christians need this Holy Spirit, given at Pentecost, to fulfill their callings in Christ. Now the teachings of Jesus, as well as the saving realities of His passion, death, and resurrection, are established in His People. All the prophecies of the [Torah](#) and the Prophets pointed to this "Day of the Lord" when the Spirit of God would become the driving force of God's covenant people. Without this gift of the Spirit, God's People continue but are stuck—out of gas—unable to fulfill everything that God has revealed in Christ.

Despite appearances to the contrary, there's no shortage of God in our world. The only fuel crisis for the Christian is refusing to fill up our lives with the Spirit of God. That is why St. Paul commanded Christians to "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). We have to keep our tanks full. The consequences of not doing so are similar to not keeping gas in our automobile's tank: we will stall out, stranded on the roads of life, flashers embarrassingly shouting our vulnerability and lack of foresight. It's bad enough to be physically out of gas, yet it's even worse not to be filled with the Spirit. We are, after all, talking about eternal things, the essence of who we truly are.

So, how do we fill up our spiritual tanks with the Holy Spirit? This, according to [St. Seraphim of Sarov](#), the great 19th century Russian wonderworker, is the ultimate question of the Christian's life:

...the true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are the only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. ... [O]nly good deeds done for Christ's sake bring us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. ... That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: "He who does not gather with Me scatters."

St. Seraphim merely echoes what St. Paul was saying in Ephesians: *"Do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your hearts, always and for everything giving thanks in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."*

All this involves a twofold movement: emptying, and filling. You cannot pour anything into a full container; first, you have to empty it out. That's why we can't be "drunk with wine" or anything else, for that matter. We've got to make room for God in our lives, and takes very concrete actions and effort that must be done first. We've got to turn away from our passions, and engage in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and works of mercy. That's self-emptying, in order to be filled. Second, we've got to glorify Christ in His Body, the Church, and in our lives. It's amazing how important to Paul worship is to being filled with the Spirit. To that, St. Seraphim adds concrete "good deeds" done in the Name of Christ.

It's all very simple, really, but it is costly, to be sure. "Emptying" and "filling" is the basic rhythm of our life in Christ, in the Spirit of God. The [Feast of Pentecost](#) recalls us to this dynamic, powerful life. Have you checked your gauge lately?

OUR COMMUNITY

Building Update

Hall Structure & Parking Lot Completed

Construction Suspended as We Consider Funding Options

The family and friends of Saint Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church are encouraged to pray for our building project, a multipurpose hall located on Old Lake Road in north Merced, as our funding from the Mindala Family Foundation is depleted, and construction is suspended. The building is now up and locked, and the parking lot and entrance off Old Lake Road is completed.

As of this writing, financial resources are possible through the sale of the four acre subdivision "split off" from our church property, as well as through a capital campaign. Our general contractor, Commercial Construction Company of Merced, estimates a balance of around \$750,000 to complete the building.

How did this situation happen? The financial problems arose do largely to skyrocketing construction prices during the past few years. Many other projects in our area have fallen victim to the same rising costs. First Baptist Church here in Merced recently completed their church building, which was originally budgeted at 2.2 million, only to have it cost 4.5 million when all was said and done.

Many meetings have been held to consider our situation, including an encouraging visit from His Grace, Bishop-elect Benjamin, as well as Fathers Ian MacKinnon and Matthew Tate. After all the information and viewpoints were heard, our archpastors encouraged us to hold steady to the completion of the building.

So, in spite of the challenging circumstances, the good news is that—for the cost of perhaps two modest area houses—we will have a wonderful facility. In the meantime, the Parish Council is working to move ahead with our project.

It goes without saying that there are many temptations when such difficulties confront a small congregation like ours. Some are tempted to not listen to all the options. Some are tempted to despair, while others might be cavalier about the depth of the matter. Some might be tempted to bury their heads in the sand, while others want to engage in blaming and accusation. We must be prayerfully balanced in our approach, recognizing the every parish experience major challenges and decisions in their lives. We must lovingly hear one another, with respect, always seeking God's will for us as a church. And, we must be patient:

**Those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40.31)**

All are encouraged to attend all meetings of the Council and the Parish, and to participate in the important discussions and decisions to be made.



Parish Meeting Held

Parish Budget Established, Parish Council Elected

After many delays due to lack of quorum, the annual Parish Meeting was held on month date of this year. We reviewed 2006, budgeted for 2007, and elected our new Parish Council members. Full Parish Meeting booklets are available to anyone who was not at the Parish Meeting.

Our 2007 Parish Council members are the following:

Warden: Petar Magazinovic

Assistant Warden: Fred Miklasevich

Treasurer: William Stickney

Financial Secretary: John Cheevers

Secretary: Jan Choma

Member at large: Mark Doiel

President & Rector: Priest David Thatcher

While there were many blessings for us in 2006, it was also a year of grave financial difficulties for the mission. The stewardship giving was reduced, in part, due to the moving from the area of members who were strong stewards. The end result is that our reserves have been depleted, and now our mission's finances are virtually month to month. This is obviously a fiscally dangerous situation for our mission parish to be in, and 2007 will require great consistency of stewardship by every member for us to continue as a community with a normal mission parish life.

*A Change of Geography and Clime*

Doiel Family to Spend A Year Abroad

Mark Doiel and family are not a part of a [reality show](#), but they really will be "changing places" for an entire year with a family from Europe, beginning this August. The Doiels are bundling up and heading abroad to the country of [Finland](#), the easternmost of the [Nordic countries](#). Mark, who teaches music at Merced College, has been accepted into a special [Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program](#). This program "involves a year or semester [in] direct exchange with a counterpart in another country teaching the same subject(s) at the same level." In other words, Mark and family will change places with a Finnish college music educator and his family.

We will definitely miss the Doiels, yet are thrilled for them in this grand adventure. The hope to visit other nearby European countries, including perhaps Russia, Norway, and Ireland. Plans are being made now for a *Finnish Send-Off Party* for the Doiels before they leave.

The following is an (edited) article from the *Merced Sun-Star* (March 31-April 1, 2007):

MC Instructor Will Teach in Fulbright Program

By Victor A. Patton

Mark Doiel may not speak Finnish, but the universal language of music is one he's spoken fluently for most of his life.

Doiel, a professor of music at Merced College, is about to take that language and engage in an international conversation that most professors only dream about. He has been accepted into the renowned Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, a program whereby colleges in the United States trade professors with a college in another country for one year. In Doiel's case, he'll be teaching music at the Kuopio Academy of Music and Dance, which is located in the city of Kuopio in eastern Finland.

On the Finnish side of the program, conductor Rauno Tikkanen, 47, director of the Kuopio Academy of Music,

will spend one year teaching Doiel's classes at Merced College.

Doiel, 47, won't be going on his Nordic musical quest alone, however. He'll be accompanied by his wife Kristine and children Zachary, 21, Benjamin, 16 and Lucas, 11. "It's pretty tough to get, so we're very thankful and fortunate that I've been selected," Doiel said.

"What I am really interested in is, there's so much culture. If you're living in another country for a year, you're no longer a tourist. You can start meeting local people." During his time at the Kuopio Academy of Music, he'll be able to conduct a Finnish orchestra, as well as teach the classes that would normally be taught by Tikkanen.

For the past nine years, Doiel has taught piano, music history, music theory and concert band at Merced College. While piano is his primary instrument, he also plays saxophone, flute, clarinet and accordion, as well as a little bit of "noodling around" on the guitar.

He has played music since age 5, learning piano in his hometown of Saugus. By junior high school, he was in his first rock band, in the vein of classic rock groups like King Crimson, Yes and Led Zeppelin, and eventually moved on to the California Institute of Fine Arts in Valencia, earning a bachelor's degree and a master's in music composition.

His current musical tastes are varied, ranging from Russian composer Igor Stravinsky to American jazz great John Coltrane and Brazil's Hermeto Pasqual.

John Spevak, Merced College's vice president of instruction, said Doiel is the fourth professor in recent memory from Merced College to study as a Fulbright scholar, and the first to participate in the Fulbright Exchange Program. "Fulbright carries a pretty impressive name, because it is the one entity that really pursues international scholarship. It's really an honor for a professor, as well as a college, to be selected," Spevak said. "Likewise, it's a broadening opportunity for our students and our staff to see music education provided by a very accomplished instructor from another country."

While he's in Finland, Doiel and his family will live in Tikkanen's home and will continue receiving his regular Merced College salary. Although he still has to learn how to speak Finnish (he'll be allowed to teach his classes in English), Doiel said he's looking forward to discovering Finnish music, particularly Finnish folk music. He said that he's also curious about what kind of music younger Finns enjoy listening to. The main thing is, I am just going to try to soak up the music, perform as much as I can and listen to other people perform as much as I can," Doiel said. "It's going to be an adventure, that's for sure."

Axios! Axios! Axios!

"Deacon Gabe" is now Father Gabe

Our Man in South Canaan is ordained on St. Patrick's Day

It is a joy to announce that our own "Deacon Gabe" has been ordained to the order of the holy priesthood at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, located in South Canaan, PA, by the hands of His Grace, the [Rt. Rev. TIKHON](#), Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania. Bishop TIKHON (not to be confused with the now retired Bishop of the Diocese of the West) is the rector of St. Tikhon's Seminary.

Congratulations to Father Gabriel and Matushka Terri, as they now plan for return to the Diocese of the West and serve at a parish yet to be announced by His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN. *Axios! Axios! Axios!*



The former Deacon Gabe with Matushka Terri as they receive the blessing for a journey on July 22, 2006, in preparation for their travel to St. Tikhon Orthodox Theological Seminary, in South Canaan, PA.

Congratulations!

Nicole Acton, Nicole de Ayora, & Younes Benomar Graduate

Congratulations and "Many Years!" to Nicole Acton, Nicole De Ayora, and Younes Benomar as they graduate from college.

Nicole Katherine Acton is graduating from San Joaquin Valley College, Visalia, CA, in the Dental Hygiene Class of 2007. Nicole has already passed the national exam in Dental Hygiene with high marks, and will be taking the State exam later this summer.

Nicole de Ayora is graduating from the University of California, Santa Barbara with the B.A. degree, in two majors. Nicole was an outstanding scholar there at UCSB, and worked as a journalist at the [Santa Barbara Independent](#) while pursuing her studies.

Younes Benomar, a catechumen here at St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox church and the husband of Amy de Ayora, is graduating with a Bachelor's degree from California State University, Stanislaus. Younes double majored in Spanish and Mathematics, and looks forward to a career in teaching.

May God richly bless all of these outstanding young adults, and lead them in their careers and lives!



New Catechumens

Three Catechumens Now Enrolled at Our Mission

We are happy to announce that our mission parish now has three catechumens enrolled and preparing for entrance into the Orthodox Church.

Younes Benomar is the husband of Amy de Ayora, as well as the father of Ilias Benomar, who was baptized in late 2007. Younes is a native of Morocco, and lived and worked in Spain prior to coming to the United States. Younes just recently received full citizenship, so congratulations to him! Younes' sponsor is Father David.

Kory Feltz is the wife of Paul Feltz, who comes from a Greek Orthodox background; Kory and Paul are the parents of Charlie Dimitri, who was baptized late 2006. Both Kory and Paul work at Mercy Medical Center; Kory is a surgical nurse there, while Paul is the Director of Human Resources. Kory's sponsor is Kelly Kiliveros.

Tonya Stewart is the proud mom of three children, together with Stauros Kiskiras. Tonya hails originally from New York City, and lived in Las Vegas, NV, for a time. Their children are Tre, Anthony, and baby Eleni. Tonya's sponsors are Matushka Karen and Kelly Kiliveros.

Please pray for our catechumens, as well as their sponsors and spouses, as they prepare to be received into the Orthodox Church. This is a real time of testing and discovery, as they learn of Christ. God bless them all!

Baptismal Announcement

Stauros Kiskiras and Tonya Stewart are pleased to announce that their children,

Anthony and Eleni,

Will receive the Holy Mysteries of
Baptism and Chrismation

on Saturday, May 26, 2007 at 1:00 PM

A Reception will follow at the Home of the Thatchers

All Are Invited to Attend

IMPORTANT & UPCOMING EVENTS

Class:
The Psalms



A Study in Scripture & Worship

Wednesdays 7-8:30 pm

Location:
The Chapel at
Mercy Medical Center,
Dominican Campus
Please join us!

St. Eugene's Camp

July 1-7, 2007

Location:
St. Nicholas Ranch
Dunlap, CA

*Contact Matushka Karen for
more information*

**Project Mexico
Mission Trip**

July 17-24, 2007

Missioners:
Charity Thatcher
Gabriella Thatcher
Fr. David

**A Notice About our Monthly Newsletter,
*The Proclaimer***

We are changing how we send you the church newsletter.

To save money, time, and effort,
we will now distribute *The Proclaimer* via email attachment.

When you receive the email, please simply **download** the newsletter, or just open and print it.

We will still send, via "snail mail" (the post office), hard copies of newsletter to those for whom we do not have an email address. *The Proclaimer* will also be available on our website:

StMaryMagdaleneChurch.org

Please send Fr. David your email address, if the church does not have it.

EVERY MONTH A TEST OF FAITHFULNESS

Remember to be Faithful to Saint Mary
Magdalene Orthodox Church in your
Christian Stewardship!

***Your Regular Christian Stewardship to this
Mission is Crucial at this time—especially
as we face the summer months.***

Thanks be to God, we are in the black
financially as of April, 2007. This is reason
for real rejoicing, especially when viewed
in the light of 2006, a difficult year.

Because our financial reserves are low at
this time, this mission parish needs your
REGULAR, CONSISTENT GIVING
every single month.

Please send in your stewardship
offering today. God bless you!

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

CALLING CHRISTIAN REBELS

By Marcia Segelstein

Like it or not, being a traditional Christian in our current culture means being a rebel. It means taking unpopular stands on highly charged issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and divorce. It means risking derision, humiliation, and scorn. It means looking at the way things are and—when they undermine the Word of God—challenging them.

Peter Kreeft, in his book [*The Snakebite Letters: Devilishly Devious Secrets for Subverting Society as Taught in Tempter's Training School*](#), includes the following advice from a senior demon to his apprentice regarding the person he's trying to ensnare:

Your patient, like most Americans, is a conformist (though he fancies himself a freethinker). He fears being different, eccentric, or (worst of all) 'a fanatic,' much more than he fears being wicked.

It reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw recently that read "Spiritual people inspire me; religious people frighten me." Deeply held religious beliefs are out of fashion in America at the moment. A recent survey shows that America, unlike Europe, remains at least a nominally Christian country, with over 80 percent of Americans identifying themselves as Christians. But how can that be when the culture is in such obvious decline, and has been since the 1960s?

Imagine a mother living in the 1950s, busy raising her children, who suddenly finds herself transported to the year 2007. She picks up the woman's magazine on her kitchen table and blushes in embarrassment. The headline on the cover screams out "Seven Secrets to Great Sex." Next, in some confusion, she reads that the cover story is about how important it is for her to put herself above her children and her husband. Wondering if the world has gone mad, she comes across a special section titled "Divorce: How to Share Your Children with Your Ex-Husband's New Wife." And finally she stares in disbelief at a headline that reads: "Abortion and Guilt: They Don't Have to Go Hand in Hand." Thankfully for her, she wakes from this nightmare and laughs at the impossibly ridiculous future she had conjured up.

We, on the other hand, are living the nightmare and sometimes barely notice how out of whack things have become.

What about abortion? To call it a disgrace is an understatement. It's estimated that every day in America, 3,700 babies are aborted, some for reasons as simple—and repugnant—as the fact that the parents had their hearts set on the other gender. It is unspeakable.

Or consider the state of marriage. Brides may still get married in white gowns under church steeples, but the vows might as well read: "I will—until I don't want to any more." Fulfillment and happiness are worthier goals in our culture than commitment and perseverance. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead tackled the topic of divorce in her book [*The Divorce Culture*](#). Listen to this insightful sociological tidbit: "Beginning in the late 1950s, Americans began to change their ideas about the individual's obligations to

"... a bumper sticker I saw recently that read "Spiritual people inspire me; religious people frighten me." Deeply held religious beliefs are out of fashion in America at the moment."

family and society. Broadly described, this change was away from an ethic of obligation to others . . . and toward an obligation to self."

This new thinking, which she calls "expressive individualism," became the cultural norm and gave rise to what she calls "expressive divorce." Divorce began to shed its image as a tragic last resort for a failed marriage, and came to be seen as a journey toward greater self-awareness. But there is now, and has been for some time, empirical evidence that, as Whitehead writes, "divorce carries multiple risks and losses for children," and that in most cases children's lives are adversely affected—often quite seriously. But Whitehead's book was written ten years ago. Is anybody listening?

And then, on a lighter note, there's television. In one short generation, we've gone from shows like *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, where husband and wife Dick and Laura weren't even allowed to be seen in the same bed, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*, where the cameramen

refused to shoot Elvis below the waist—to shows like *Sex and the City*, which was literally about the sex lives of single women in New York City.

And what about movies? One generation ago, there weren't even ratings for movies. There didn't have to be. And while as a parent I'm grateful for ratings ... what I really wish is that there didn't have to be any. But what's even more upsetting is when parents decide to ignore them altogether.

One example of this, which actually got some press coverage when it came out a few years ago, was the movie *8 Mile*. It loosely told the story of rap star Eminem's coming of age in Detroit. It was appropriately rated R for containing what reviewers called "very explicit sexual references and situations," graphic violence, and "constant and extremely strong profanity" (one particular four-letter vulgarity was apparently uttered over 150 times).

According to the *Motion Picture Association of America*, the R rating meant that anyone under 17 had to be accompanied by an adult. Yet, across the country, children in droves, some as young as eight years old, were getting in to see this movie. How? Their parents were taking them!

Recently I was shopping with my then-13-year-old daughter in a clothing store popular among pre-teens and teens. It was full of moms like me with their kids and younger siblings in tow. In the sitting area near the dressing room was a prominently displayed, well-lit magazine rack full of magazines—about skateboarding, skiing, surfing—and smack dab in the middle—a well-known shall-we-say "men's" magazine with a prominently displayed woman on the cover. The next store we visited—another well-known and popular chain for young teens—had larger-than-life posters on the walls, showing carefully shot side views of girls and boys naked from the waist up—some standing, some lying down, embracing. It was essentially soft-core porn for the teen set.

Now listen to another bit of advice Peter Kreeft's literary demon offers to his evil apprentice.

The secret is the power of images. . . . If we plant the same kind of image in them over and over again through TV and movies, they'll gradually be desensitized. Already, most things the last generation would have regarded as unthinkable are commonplace on TV. . . . Nearly every single movie that's made for young people must have a dash of nudity, no matter how gratuitous (and of course never, never between married people.) And every time a boy first kisses a girl, the next scene always

shows them in bed. What a triumph of image propaganda! . . . If the sex and violence curve continues at the current rate, we'll have Hell incarnate in their minds in just two more generations. There's nothing, literally nothing, these creatures won't allow.

Abortion on demand is now just a woman's right to choose.

Taking away childhood innocence is now just keeping it real.

Divorce is just another step on the road to self-fulfillment.

The words of Isaiah 5:20 come to mind: "Woe to those who call what is bad, good, and what is good, bad, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

Christians can make a difference. Christians should make a difference. We can change the culture. Maybe traditional Christians aren't the majority in America. But it doesn't take a majority to make a difference. Sometimes it takes only one.

I have recently been reading the new book [*Amazing Grace*](#), by Eric Metaxas, which tells the story of William Wilberforce, the British MP who, based on his Christian faith, worked for twenty years with one goal in mind: to abolish the British slave trade. Year after year he was voted down, and bitterly denounced. But he persevered. He fought the culture. He fought against what had become an accepted, acceptable fact of life. And finally, just days before he died, he bowed his head and wept on the floor of Parliament as the bill finally passed—and his battle was won.

Like Wilberforce, we must stop accepting the status quo. We must stop accepting that it's OK to kill unborn babies. We must stop accepting the sexualization of children and the demise of childhood innocence. We must stop accepting divorce as a rite of passage. The next generations—our children and grandchildren—are at stake.

Opportunities abound for pursuing a culture that more closely reflects the traditional Judeo-Christian morals and values which once flourished in our country. As Jesus told his disciples: "The harvest is great . . . but the laborers are few."

Marcia Segelstein, a former producer for CBS News, is a freelance writer and mother. She resides in Weston, Conn., and is active in her church, The Anglican Church of the Advent in Greenwich.

PENTECOST

SATURDAY, MAY 26, 2007
5 pm Great Vespers

SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2007
9:40 am Hours
10 am Liturgy
1:15 pm Kneeling Vespers

AND ON MONDAY, MAY 28th
SPIRIT MONDAY LITURGY

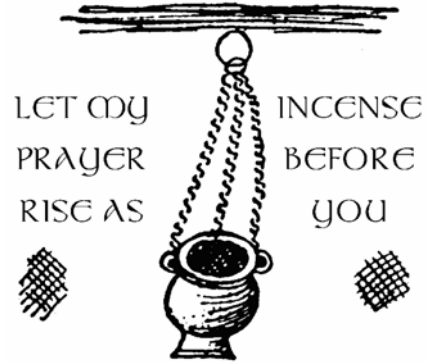
Monday, May 28th, 2007, 9:00 AM

St. Peter the Apostle
Serbian Orthodox Church
3520 First Street, Fresno, CA
(559) 227 - 5565

EVERYBODY IS CORDIALLY INVITED!

The Psalms:

A Study in Scripture & Worship



7:00 PM WEDNESDAYS
AT THE CHAPEL AT MERCY MEDICAL CENTER, DOMINICAN CAMPUS

This service, more than any other, embodies the spirit of the Great Fast, or Lent.

**ST MARY MAGDALENE
ORTHODOX CHURCH**
P. O. Box 3704
Merced, CA 95344-3704



Holy Pentecost:
The Feast of the Holy Trinity



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