

Alexis Liberovsky

An 80-year legacy

The Romanian Episcopate celebrates anniversary, looks to the future

As the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America marks the 80th Anniversary of its founding this year and approaches the half-century mark of its integration in 1960 into the Orthodox Church in America, it is timely that we reflect on its history.

Romanian Orthodox communities first began to organize in the US and Canada in the early 20th century. The first Canadian community was founded in Regina, SK, in 1902, while the first US parish was established in Cleveland, OH two years later. These parishes were served largely by itinerant priests, loosely affiliated with hierarchs in Romania. As a result, the parishes, which numbered some 40 by the late 1920s, functioned rather independently.

First steps

In view of political and ecclesiastical changes transpiring in Romania, an initial attempt was made in 1918 to organize a Romanian diocese in North America, but it failed. Eventually, a gathering of clergy and lay representatives held on April 25, 1929, officially petitioned the Romanian Patriarchate to establish an episcopate in America. This meeting – the First Congress of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America [ROEA] – is remembered as the founding event of the Episcopate, although the Holy Synod in Romania did not formally approve its petition until November of the following year.

The Episcopate's Second Congress in October 1932 approved a constitution and by-laws to delineate the Episcopate's autonomous governance.

On March 24, 1935, Archimandrite Policarp [Morusca] was consecrated in Romania as the Bishop of ROEA. He arrived in America in June and was formally enthroned as diocesan hierarch at the Episcopate Congress in Detroit in July. While his episcopal tenure in America was relatively short, lasting only four years, and at times stormy, several milestones were reached during Bishop Policarp's archpastorate. Under his leadership, *Solia*, the official periodical of the Episcopate – still published today – was inaugurated in 1936. A property in Grass Lake, Michigan to house the diocesan center, known as the *Vatra* and still used as the Episcopate's headquarters, was purchased in 1937. The Association of Romanian Orthodox Ladies' Auxiliaries in America [ARFORA] was established in 1938.

In 1939, Bishop Policarp left for Romania to attend a meeting of the Holy Synod. Due to the outbreak of World War II and other circumstances, he was unable to return to America.

Although both Bishop Policarp and the ROEA still considered him the ruling hierarch, without an episcopal presence, unity in the diocese began to weaken. Ultimately, with the communist takeover of Romania after World War II, Bishop Policarp was prevented from returning to his flock, and he was continually persecuted for the rest of life.

In 1947, Bishop Antim [Nica] was appointed, with the involvement of the Romanian government, as ROEA's new ruling hierarch. In spite of its dire need for episcopal guidance, the ROEA rejected his appointment and decided to sever its ties to the Romanian Patriarchate. Unsuccessful in its continued efforts to subordinate ROEA, the Patriarchate established a new entity, the Romanian Orthodox Missionary Episcopate in America and Canada, in 1950, and consecrated Father Andrei Moldovan, a Romanian-born US citizen, as its ruling hierarch. While the vast majority of Romanians in North America remained faithful to ROEA, Bishop Andrei and his followers soon sought to gain control of Church properties through the courts, but were largely unsuccessful.

A new era

Signaling a final break with the Patriarchate, though never severing its ties to Bishop Policarp – at the time living in forcible retirement and deprived of all personal property – the ROEA Church Congress in 1951 elected Viorel Trifa, a lay theologian, to be its hierarch. As soon as he was elected, a defamatory smear campaign began, engineered by the newly established Romanian Missionary Episcopate and surreptitiously fueled by communist government officials in Romania with the collaboration of the Church in Romania, which purported that during World War II, Trifa had engaged in political activity to incite anti-semitic violence.

In order for him to be tonsured a monk, ordained, and then consecrated to the episcopacy, many Orthodox jurisdictions in North America were approached, including the "Metropolia" [today the Orthodox Church in America]. None wished to get involved. Some were swayed by the desire to maintain good relations with the Romanian Patriarchate, while others were apprehensive because of the accusations against Trifa. Eventually, hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA (at the time considered non-canonical, but since 1995 under the Ecumenical Patriarchate) tonsured Viorel Trifa a monk with the name Valerian, ordained him to the diaconate and priesthood, and consecrated him to the episcopacy on April 27, 1952.

As Bishop Policarp was still alive in Romania, Bishop Valerian was initially considered an auxiliary bishop, but in effect he headed the diocese as a diocesan hierarch. Under his leadership, many positive developments in the Episcopate took place. Administrative and financial order were established. A multitude of liturgical and educational materials were published. During the years of his episcopacy, the number of ROEA priests grew from 28 to 61. Under his guidance, the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA was founded in 1967 by Mother Alexandra, the former Romanian Princess Ileana. With

the death of Bishop Policarp in Romania on October 26, 1958, Bishop Valerian became the diocesan hierarch, and the last string of ROEA's formal ties to Romania had been severed.

A nagging concern for the Bishop Valerian was canonical affiliation, as it was clear to him that it was ecclesologically irregular for the Episcopate to be independent of and unaffiliated with any larger Church body. By 1960, the Metropolia agreed to accept Bishop Valerian and ROEA into its fold. In order to allay any doubts about the validity of his ordinations and episcopal consecration, Bishop Valerian submitted to consecration at Saint Sergius Chapel at the Metropolitan's residence in Oyster Bay Cove, NY.

Bishop Valerian enthusiastically supported the Metropolia's movement towards autocephaly, sharing the vision of "local" Church and unity. When the Orthodox Church in America received autocephaly in 1970, Bishop Valerian reconfirmed the ROEA's affiliation with the OCA through a special bilateral agreement. For his participation in the Church's preparatory work for autocephaly, he received special recognition with his elevation to the rank of archbishop. He was chosen to head the newly established OCA Department of Canonical Affairs. He

also ably represented the Church in the ecumenical arena, particularly in the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ.

Unfortunately, as Archbishop Valerian's archpastoral skills and authority, as well as the love and respect of his flock grew, the vicious smear campaign against his person became more intense and eventually moved into the arena of the civil courts. As the burdens of the legal actions undertaken against him took up more and more of his time, taking a toll on his health, Archbishop Valerian requested that an auxiliary bishop be elected to assist him. Father Nathaniel Popp was nominated auxiliary bishop at a special ROEA Congress in September 1980, canonically elected by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, and consecrated Bishop of Dearborn Heights on November 15, 1980.

So as not to further encumber his diocese with the protracted libelous litigation against him, Archbishop Valerian decided to surrender his US citizenship and retire in June 1984. He left the US in August 1984. He died in Portugal on January 28, 1987 at the age of 72, and was buried at the Vatra in Michigan.

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Above/ Bishop Policarp and Archbishop Valerian headed the Episcopate from 1935 until 1984.

Left/ Present Auxiliary Bishop Irineu and Archbishop Nathaniel at memorial to Bishop Policarp at the Vatra.

Below/ The Church congress, held annually over Fourth of July weekend, gather faithful from across the US and Canada.



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With four years of episcopal mentoring under Archbishop Valerian, Bishop Nathaniel was well prepared to succeed him. A special electoral congress was held in October 1984, at which Bishop Nathaniel was chosen ruling hierarch from among three candidates. This selection was canonically confirmed by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, with Bishop Nathaniel's installation as ruling hierarch taking place on November 17, 1984.

In October 1999, Bishop Nathaniel was elevated to the rank of archbishop. In his quarter century of archpastoral leadership, the number of ROEA parishes and missions has grown from 49 to 98, and monastic communities have increased from one to three. He has been an outspoken advocate of autocephaly and Orthodox unity in North America. With the growth of the diocese, Archimandrite Irineu [Duvlea] was elected and consecrated diocesan auxiliary, Bishop of Dearborn Heights, in November 2002.

New realities

While Romania was under communist rule, ROEA always strove to provide support for the suffering Church in Romania. The fall of the totalitarian regime there opened windows for humanitarian aid and missionary initiatives channeled by ROEA and growing closeness and cooperation in many areas. Since 1993, ROEA and the Missionary Episcopate – today known as the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of America [ROAA] – have engaged in ongoing official dialogue. With increasing frequency, hierarchs, clergy, and faithful from both dioceses participate in each other's ecclesiastical celebrations and events and continue to develop strong contacts. A significant flow of new immigrants from post-communist Romania has greatly augmented both dioceses with the opening of many new parishes and missions. During the past few years, the official joint dialogue has turned towards unification of the dioceses into a united Romanian Orthodox presence in North America. Talk of a Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate of North America, ostensibly an autonomous body affiliated with the Patriarchate of Romania, has generated much discussion and caused some controversy. Documents issued by members of the official dialogue repeatedly emphasize that such unification is seen as an interim step towards the unity of all Orthodox in North America. In March 2008, Archbishop Nathaniel said that the dialogue towards unity is "positive and encouraging for the mission and life of our Episcopate in the US and Canada" and that "the healing of the estrangement of the two Romanian Orthodox eparchies in North America, and the movement toward the unity of all Orthodox in North America, with which the Church of Romania also agrees, is needed."

May the Holy Spirit guide this work! ■

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Great summer reading!

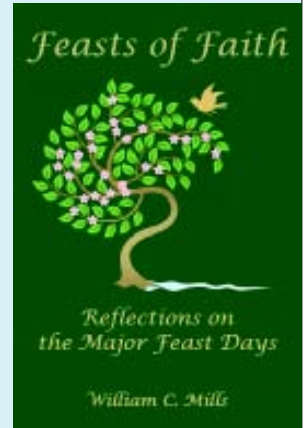
■ *Feasts of Faith*, the latest in a series of popular books by **Fr. William Mills**, rector of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin Church, Charlotte, NC, and adjunct professor of religious studies at Queens University.

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Feasts of Faith, together with Fr. William's other books, **From Pascha to Pentecost, Prepare O Bethlehem**, and **Baptize All Nations**, are ideal for reference in conjunction with personal Bible reading and within the context of a Bible study group.

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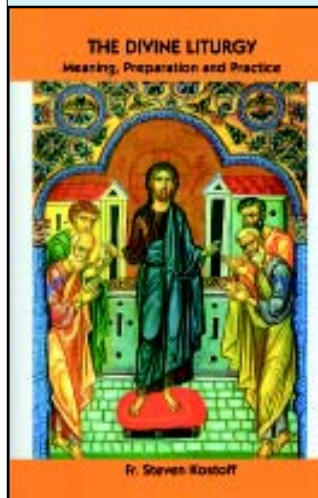
www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org.



■ While *The Divine Liturgy: Meaning, Preparation and Practice* by **Fr. Steven Kostoff**, rector of Christ the Saviour/Holy Spirit Church, Cincinnati, OH, is a modest

work – a mere 40 pages – it is filled with a wealth of information on the Divine Liturgy, as the book's title states. While emphasizing the importance of doing things "decently and in order," the author stresses that the Liturgy is "not to be mechanical, formal or lifeless," adding that "Saint Paul's admonition is not a 'straight jacket.'"

The book is sure to be of value in adult study groups and in the instruction of potential converts.



The Divine Liturgy:

Meaning, Preparation and Practice is available from Synaxis Press, 37323 Hawkins-Pickle Rd., Dwedney, BC V0M1H0 Canada.

■ *The Apostol* – containing the readings from the Epistles, Prokeimena, Alleluia Verses, and antiphons for the entire liturgical year is being reprinted by **St Tikhon's Bookstore**. Edited by **Sergei Arkhipov**, the volume may be ordered at pre-publication prices for \$49.95/soft cover and \$79.95/hard cover. Order at http://www.stots.edu/bookstore_contact.html. ■