

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION'S FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

by William Bush

The oldest photograph known of London Ontario's first Orthodox Christian church dates from around 1917. In this early image we see an imposing wooden structure with double towers, flags flying. It rises behind a very large crowd of faithful, the women in long skirts, puffed-sleeved blouses and enormous hats, the men in starched collars and dark suits, assembled for the Bishop's visit. From the church steps, staff in hand, the Bishop, flanked by his assistants, surveys the sizeable crowd which, we are told, was composed of both Greeks and Russians.

That first Orthodox Christian Church was indeed London's original "Holy Transfiguration Church" and the namesake for our present Antiochian parish. Erected near the river in South London, off Adelaide Street, it was attached to the Russian Patriarchate, the only Orthodox jurisdiction active in North America prior to the upheavals which followed World War I when mass immigrations of Orthodox people justified the launching of purely ethnic parishes throughout North America.

The most famous of those early Russian missionaries to North America was, of course, the simple monk-hermit wonder-worker, St. Herman of Alaska, today honoured world-wide by the Orthodox. Luminaries of the Greek Church such as Elder Aimilianos, former Abbot of Simonas Petra monastery on Mt. Athos, along with his spiritual daughters at Ormylia monastery in northern Greece, today bear particular devotion to the precious relic of St. Herman of Alaska they guard in their monastery as a tangible witness to the profound and unbroken unity of Greek and Russian monastic tradition.

Holy Transfiguration parish in London was actually able to continue its pan-Orthodox witness until after World War II. It was only at that point that the great influx of new Greek and Russian immigrants brought about the founding of Holy Trinity Greek parish on Richmond St. under the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, then, shortly thereafter, that of the Russian parish of the Holy Sudary on Fairview, under the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. With the founding of these two ethnic parishes the membership of Holy Transfiguration was sapped and the parish defunct by mid-century. The concept of a pan-Orthodox parish in London would be revived only with the arrival of Professor Dimitri Pospelovsky at the University of Western Ontario in the fall of 1972.

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1972-1977

In launching the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at Western University in the fall of 1972, Dr. Pospelovsky was inevitably reaffirming the importance of the unity of Orthodoxy beyond all ethnicity, a concept embodied in London's first Orthodox Church though admittedly probably more from circumstances than from any burning conviction.

Seconding Dr. Pospelovsky as Faculty Advisor for the Fellowship was the writer of these pages, Professor William Bush, a convert from the Greek Church. They were supported by Dr. Bush's Greek-Lebanese graduate student, Subdeacon George Athanasiadis, who regularly led prayers in English at our weekly meetings, held in a classroom on campus, icon cards set up in the rack of the chalkboard. Very occasionally these weekly prayers were supplemented by services in English served by Fr. Apostolos Ananiadis, parish priest of Holy Trinity Greek parish, under whom Subdeacon George served.

Our fairly rare English Liturgies nonetheless never failed to attract non-student Orthodox in London who were not served by London's ethnic parishes. Convinced of a genuine need for some sort of permanent English-language Orthodox presence in London, Professors Pospelovsky and Bush approached the Greek bishop from Toronto at the end of a dinner given in his honour by the Fellowship. Would it not be natural for the Fellowship's cordial relationship with the Greek parish to blossom into the formation of a permanent English-language congregation, operating under the blessing of the Greek bishop? After hearing our petition the hierarch's only words were the enigmatic words addressed to Dr. Bush: "You must make it impossible, Doctor, for me not to do something." Crushed in our hopes, we could only continue to wait before God.

After Pascha in 1977 Father Apostolos Ananiadis was suddenly transferred from Holy Trinity to Toronto. For the next eight months, his replacement, sent merely as a supply-priest at Holy Trinity, proved destined to play a decisive role in the emergence of Holy Transfiguration English-language parish.

His name was Father Hilarion Yerakis, a Manitoba-born Greek-Canadian with a Ukrainian mother. After high school, he had gone to Greece to carry out theological studies in Athens. He was then tonsured a monk at Holy Transfiguration monastery in the Meteora. The Abbot of this monastery was the charismatic Elder Aimilianos who had built up a vibrant community of young, highly-educated monks. This was indeed part of that great revival of Greek monasticism starting around 1970, as it were in answer to the prayers of St. Nektarios for the rebirth of an intense monastic life in Greece, something that did indeed occur fifty years after St. Nektarios' death in 1920.

The reputation of Father Aimilianos's Meteora monastery had reached the fathers of Mt. Athos in their search for a community suitable for rejuvenating the venerable, but moribund Simonas Petra monastery. As Father Aimilianos was seeking a site free from the distractions of tour buses, he transferred his young community - to which Fr. Hilarion belonged - to the Holy Mountain.

When Fr. Hilarion arrived in London he was only 27 years of age, but already tonsured as a monk of the Great-Schema. He had been released from the Holy Mountain to assist the Greek bishop in Chicago in founding a monastery to which the bishop hoped to retire. Almost immediately upon Fr. Hilarion's arrival in New York, however, these plans were crushed by the sudden death of the Bishop of Chicago. So it was that an Athonite monk such as Fr. Hilarion was free to be assigned as a temporary priest at Holy Trinity in London.

Unwavering boldness before God, coupled with Athonite zeal, seemed integral factors in this young priest's charismatic personality. With no hesitation whatsoever, and even as he pushed the people of Holy Trinity to heights of devotion never seen before on a Sunday, Fr. Hilarion started treating our university work as part of his own. He firmly supported the Fellowship's attempts at presenting Orthodoxy in English and after celebrating a highly memorable English liturgy of unequalled intensity in Huron College chapel in October, he startled us at our next weekly meeting by stating that such English liturgies on Saturdays must be scheduled twice monthly and that he himself would celebrate them in the Greek Church.

Personally, I was horrified. I knew that there was only me to be responsible for the music and how many other things I had to do, I reasoned! And, in any case, moving from an occasional Liturgy in English in some neutral setting such as Huron College Chapel to praying in English in the local Greek parish twice a month seemed a very big step.

These more frequent English liturgies drew more people, however, many of whom were unknown to members of the Fellowship. So it was that Fr. Hilarion, because of his burning conviction that an English-language parish was a necessity in London, as one of his last acts just before leaving London at the end of December, 1977, invited all those interested in forming an English-language church to attend an organizational meeting in his office at the Greek parish house. At this meeting Dr. Pospelovsky was elected Chairman of our Mission, Dr. Bush Vice-Chairman, Sarah Fluter Secretary, and Vera Sander Treasurer.

The most important decision reached on that late-December afternoon in 1977 however was the choice of a parish name. After recounting the history of Orthodoxy's beginnings in London, Dr. Pospelovsky, proposed that we, as a pan-Orthodox group, actually revive the name of the now defunct "Holy Transfiguration" parish. Fr. Hilarion plainly stated that it would be necessary for us to seek official recognition outside the Greek jurisdiction, something our experience had already amply confirmed for us. By choosing "Holy Transfiguration" would we not spiritually join our prayers to those of London's first praying congregation which had, of necessity, also been pan-Orthodox? Like them, with God's help, we would bear witness to the truth that Orthodoxy is beyond all ethnic identity.

My faithful Greek graduate student, Sub-deacon George Athanasiades (today Father Anthony serving the Greek Church in Quebec), worked very closely with Fr. Hilarion during the latter's eight months here. Sub-deacon Georges was as enthusiastic as Fr. Hilarion in regard to founding an English mission in London and was always at our meetings in his cassock to lead our prayers in English. Now he was to become an indispensable part of our budding mission project. Though never officially elected member of any mission council, his role in the early mission was a dominant one, assisting whatever priest appeared and always managing to smooth over any liturgical differences.

I cannot but recall here, as it were in parentheses, my own particular recollection of Subdeacon George's charismatic cry at the end of Vespers on Saturday evenings, after we started praying as a mission. Today, a quarter century later, that weekly cry still echoes in my memory when the priest utters his closing invocation at Vespers: "Most Holy Theotokos, save us!" Sub-deacon George's exclamation was, as it were, personalized: "Most Holy Theotokos, save our mission!" It was indeed a cry to which I could fervently joined the very deep longing of my heart as I crossed myself and also prayed: "Most Holy Theotokos, save our mission!"

I should in all justice also recall here, still between parentheses, that after Subdeacon George's ordination to the priesthood in the early 1980s, another Greek student Subdeacon, today Protopresbyter Peter Avgeropoulos of Toronto's Cathedral of the Virgin Mary, would replace him in leading our prayers and he too, with no suggestion whatsoever from anyone, immediately took up Subdeacon George's cry of "Most Holy Theotokos, save our mission!" Indeed, Subdeacon Peter's devotion to our future was also without limits. I recall with deep emotion the occasion when Subdeacon Peter, having had a flat tire on the 401 when returning late on Saturday night with his Greek band from a wedding engagement in Toronto, had arrived back in London only at 5:00 o'clock on Sunday morning. Nonetheless he appeared in his cassock in our Dundas St. basement office chapel at 9:30, ready to lead our prayers.

But I am getting ahead of our story...

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(1978)

At the beginning of January, 1978, Professor Pospelovsky arranged for a weekend visit to London by Fr. Alexis Vinogradov, an OCA priest from New York who, as a professional architect, proposed to come here and work to support his family while building up an English-language parish. Fr. Alexis' January 21 visit fittingly fell on the Feast of Holy Orthodoxy's great witness, St. Maximos the Confessor, and marks what we have come to regard as the actual "founding" of our parish. This is because, liturgically speaking, it was the first time we found ourselves obliged to set the English translation of the Troparion of the Transfiguration to the Greek tone and sing it as our parish troparion. For the first time we were distinguishing ourselves from other Orthodox parishes in London.

Fr. Alexis' celebration of the Divine Liturgy in English on that morning of January 21, 1978, at Huron College Chapel, sponsored by the University Orthodox Christian Fellowship, was truly charismatic. Our desire to draw together all who might be interested in forming an English-language parish was greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm of those present. Fr. Alexis' own enthusiasm for London's potential echoed our own. He announced that he would definitely be moving to London in August with his wife and two children, dependent, of course, on the blessing of the OCA Bishop in Montreal whom he would petition for a modest stipend of \$400.00 per month to allow him, during the course of his first year here, the means of survival. Hearts and hopes were high as we all bade farewell to Fr. Alexis.

It was at this point that Professor Pospelovsky made a move destined to prove far more decisive to our parish's future than any of us could have dreamed at the time and one which I actually opposed. Having assumed responsibility for the music for the services myself, I was quite happy to sit back and await Fr. Alexis' arrival in August. By God's grace, however, my Russian colleague completely disagreed. He was convinced that the bright flame kindled in London by Fr. Alexis' visit must be nurtured while we awaited his return. He therefore arranged for the OCA Bishop in Montreal to send us immediately, for a limited period of six weeks during Great Lent, a monk-priest who would lead us in Saturday Vespers and Sunday Divine Liturgies each week. Thus, it was hoped, we might have a tiny praying congregation ready and waiting for Fr. Alexis' August arrival.

With Dr. Bush responsible for the music, services were held during those six weeks in the tiny Protestant Chapel of St. Joseph's Hospital, kindly offered us by the Sisters of St. Joseph through the good offices of Fr. Joseph Hardy, our Roman Catholic friend. Those six weeks of weekly Saturday and Sunday worship stretched into the beginning of March, at which time our monk was due to go assist with pre-Easter and Easter services in Toronto. The end of those six weeks also was to coincide with a startling and devastating announcement from Fr. Alexis: the OCA bishop in Montreal had refused him all assistance for coming to London.

Professor Pospelovsky, visibly shaken and invoking the sabbatical leave due him starting in July, resigned as President of the Parish Council, leaving me, as Vice-Chairman with the option of scuttling the whole affair or of taking over Professor Pospelovsky's voluminous correspondence and trying to keep our dream alive. I had after all been praying for ten years for English language worship in London and now, to my horror, the ball had been passed directly to me and only a "yes" or "no" would do as an answer. As reluctant as I was to assume the leadership, I was even more reluctant, fearing God, to be responsible for killing something I had prayed for ten years.

Moreover, as so often seems to happen in moments of crisis, God can send us very simple demands that sometimes help us forget our qualms about bigger problems, allowing us to forge ahead. In this case it was Mrs. Fluter's sudden enthusiasm for celebrating Pascha "all in English."

According to correspondence passed me by Dr. Pospelovsky, there was an OCA priest in Windsor on sick-leave from his Detroit Albanian parish. He was indeed free to come to London for Palm Sunday and also to celebrate Paschal Matins and Liturgy which was done in the Fluter home. This priest, Fr. James Blomquist, an ex-Marine, then continued to come to us through the first part of the summer until Fr. Gregory Papazian, another monk from Montreal and a friend of Vera Sander, was allowed by the OCA bishop in Montreal to come twice monthly for six weeks.

By this time Fr. Joseph Hardy had arranged with the Ursulines at Brescia College for us to have the weekly use of a larger space for our Saturday and Sunday worship than that afforded us by the tiny Protestant Chapel at St. Joseph's Hospital. Vera Sander's two children were both baptized at Brescia that summer by Fr. Gregory, assisted by Fr. James on his last Sunday with us.

With a priest coming only every second Sunday, Subdeacon George, Vera Sander and her two children and I found every second weekend a bit of an ordeal as all those objects needed for Orthodox worship had to be taken out of boxes and then packed away again whenever we sang Saturday Vespers or Sunday Matins. On Sunday morning Subdeacon George was at the Greek church so, for two months, Vera and her children and I dragged ourselves through some very shaky attempts at singing Matins, according to Fr. Gregory's instruction. It was extremely painful but... Vera's children had been baptized. We could not give up.

Existing thus by the grace of God alone and without any visible ecclesiastical structure, we were dependent upon whatever priest visited - such as Fr. James or Fr. Gregory - to provide an Antimension in order to celebrate the

Holy Mysteries. This was, of course, far from a normal situation since the bishop blesses an antiminsion for each individual parish.

First Fr. James, then Fr. Gregory, advised me that our situation had to change: our mission must get attached to a bishop. It was decided that Professor Pospelovsky and I, along with Subdeacon George, would make the trip to Montreal to plead with the OCA Bishop for support, something all our letters had failed to obtain. However, beyond obtaining permission for Fr. Gregory to continue to come to us until August 15, this trip netted us nothing more than the episcopal observation that "founding a new mission is very hard."

Since neither the Greek nor the OCA bishop was interested in our project, it had been suggested to me by both Fr. James and Fr. Gregory that I, as Chairman, contact Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Archdiocese and seek his advice on what should be done in regard to our aspirations to found an English-language Orthodox mission in London, Ontario.

Fr. Gregory's last service with us was the Liturgy of the Dormition on August 15th, celebrated in Vera Sander's house. Fr. Gregory was assisted by the OCA priest from Toronto. It was at his suggestion that I agreed to wait to write to Metropolitan Philip until after September 30 by which date, he said, he might be receiving an assistant priest whom he would happily share with us in London. No assistant was assigned the Toronto parish, however, and the priest in Toronto thus joined his two brother OCA priests in agreeing that I should write Metropolitan Philip of the Antiochian Archdiocese in New Jersey.

Metropolitan Philip immediately replied, encouraging us with very positive comments about what we were trying to do and putting me in contact with the Dean of our region in regard to having an Antiochian priest come serve us regularly. Fr. Theodore Koufos from the Antiochian parish in Toronto shortly thereafter started coming to London once a month for Evening Divine Liturgy. His first Liturgy in London was celebrated in October of 1978 and his monthly visits would continue into the next year. The Anglican priest at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orchard Park allowed us, for a modest fee, not only to hold Sunday evening liturgies in that church but also pot-luck suppers afterwards, something that usually drew a crowd of around 60 since pious Greeks usually turned up to give us moral support.

That first year of our existence, 1978, was finally crowned by a letter from the Metropolitan read out by Fr. Theodore at the December Evening Divine Liturgy, appropriately falling on the feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch: Holy Transfiguration had received official status as a mission of the Antiochian Archdiocese and henceforth would be under the protection of Metropolitan Philip. We would now be receiving our own Antiminsion.

iii (1979)

Father Theodore, who always refused to accept even travel expenses from us, continued to encourage us with his monthly visits and in January blessed a number of houses, accompanied by Dr. Bush. Usually, he would try to arrange to stay over to visit prospective parishioners before returning to Toronto.

It was in the spring of that year that Elder Ephraim from Philotheou Monastery on the Holy Mountain was first brought to London by his spiritual children in the London Greek community. Subdeacon Georges, who met him immediately, spoke to him of our struggling new English-language mission and Fr. Ephraim immediately gave us his blessing. Nor did he delay in assuring Dr. Bush, after they had met, that what the mission was trying to do was indeed the work of Elder Ephraim's own spiritual father, Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller, whom he said we should consider a patron of our mission. Not even remotely comprehending what Elder Ephraim meant, we asked for him to explain his enigmatic words. "Oh! it is very simple!" Elder Ephraim replied with his gentle little laugh, "Elder Joseph thought everyone should be Orthodox and so do you!"

This was, of course a totally unexpected gift from God at a moment when a whole barrage of accusations had started assailing us from the ethnic churches. According to them we were "not really Orthodox," or just plain "trouble makers," or, more darkly, shameful "dividers of families." Thus being granted such approval from the Holy Mountain was a very great grace at that moment. All of this also seemed to recall that great grace given us to come into being because of an Athonite monk who just happened to be in London. As always, however, the Enemy was at the ready. In July I learned, via a copy of a letter addressed not to me, but to an ex-seminarian in Montreal, that he was to be ordained for us as a full-time "worker-priest" and was to appear in London to celebrate our patronal feast on August 6th. This letter came as a great shock. Only the previous month I had received a copy of an earlier letter to this same ex-seminarian instructing him to come to London - which he had failed to do -, obtain a job, and lead our prayers for six months, after which period, if the mission council agreed, he would be ordained. What had suddenly come about to cause such a radical change in regard to that ordination? In any case it bode no good for us.

Within six weeks of his arrival this newly-ordained priest's involvement in questionable dealings in London brought about his suspension. We were all profoundly shaken but thankful it was over.

Again, however, the grace of God immediately seemed to intervene. In the week immediately following our ordeal I received a call came from a young Antiochian priest in Pennsylvania whose parents lived outside London and who, long before becoming Orthodox, used to frequent my university office while still a Roman Catholic seminarian at St. Peter's Seminary. He was, he told me, coming to London to visit his parents the next weekend and now, being an Antiochian priest himself, he hoped to meet our newly-formed congregation. I immediately explained our disarray to him and hastened to get permission from the Metropolitan for him to celebrate the Holy Mysteries the following Sunday.

Very sympathetic to what we were trying to accomplish here in his home territory, this young priest insisted that if we truly wanted to establish our identity as an English-speaking parish we must meet to pray, every Saturday and Sunday, without fail, whether or not we had a priest. We must, he said, rent a space where we could set up an improvised chapel for our twice-weekly worship.

In the few months leading to the end of the 1979 we prayed fervently to the Theotokos and actually got rather good at singing the Akathist and Parakleisis, led by Subdeacon George. We also scoured the newspaper for affordable office space in London. Finally something was located on Dundas St., across from the Dundas Centre United Church, behind Beal Secondary School. It would serve us for five years.

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(1980-1984)

So it was that by January of 1980 we were ready to sign a one-year lease for the Dundas St. office space, in accord with our visiting priest's timely instructions. I signed as Chairman, Peter Kalogirou as Vice-Chairman, and Rose-Marie Kalogirou as Secretary-Treasurer, all of us with a certain trepidation since we realized that beyond some \$3,000 we had in the treasury there was no guarantee of paying our monthly rent or meeting our expenses except from our own pockets. What did give us courage as we signed the contract was the date on which we were signing. It was January 21, the feast of Maximos the Confessor on which, two years before, Father Alexis had come and we had sung the Transfiguration Troparion for the first time. Was renting office space for a chapel not similar to our singing our own troparion and really just another step in distinguishing ourselves as an Orthodox entity in London?

The improvised office-chapel on Dundas St. served us from 1980 until 1985. Dr. Pospelovsky, once again Chairman, gave heroic service during those years in managing to seek out each year, with the blessing of Metropolitan Philip, OCA student priests from St. Vladimir's Seminary for Holy Week. Also, by this time Chris Jennings and his mother, Despina, had become firm fixtures in our midst with Chris assuming full responsibility for the choir and chanting, much to my relief. The painful loss of Subdeacon Georges who had quite literally been whisked away from London to be ordained as Greek priest in Ottawa was tempered only by the appearance of another Greek student, Subdeacon Peter Avgeropoulos, who immediately took over the leading of our prayers and, like his predecessor, generally strove to hold things together, being there to sing the Parakleisis in English every night during the Virgin's Lent, I recall.

During those years there were very occasional visits from the Antiochian priest in Toronto, but never on a regular basis. Then Dr. Pospelovsky succeeded in getting Fr. Seraphim Storheim (today OCA Bishop of Canada), who had previously come to us for Holy Week and Easter, to come back to London for almost a year. During his eleven months Fr. Seraphim brought in eleven converts and baptized an Eritrean child. He also much improved and expanded our primitive and improvised iconostasis composed of 4 x 8 foot lattice panels.

A 1984 publicity photo, aimed at showing our diversity as a Sunday congregation, was taken with Fr. Seraphim to accompany an appeal that Dr. Pospelovsky launched asking for financial help in purchasing a Lutheran property available on Riverside Drive. Though purchase of the property proved beyond us, the appeal did stir a deep response in the heart of Fr. Steven Kostoff, a young OCA priest in the OCA Bulgarian diocese in Illinois. He shortly thereafter moved to London with his wife and children to serve us. Fr. Steven Kostoff was with us for four years, forging very close ties with the Greek disciples of Elder Ephraim. His very noble wife was obliged to work to support them. The birth of a third child however forced them to leave London for Cincinnati at the end of June, 1989.

Within the first two years of Father Steven's four-year stay we made two moves. Starting out in the Dundas St. office chapel, we then found more suitable space in a converted house on William Street where we were happily installed for Great Lent and Easter of 1985. Unfortunately the site had only one washroom and, in less than a year, city regulations forced us to find something else. Despina Jennings at that point discovered a large basement space underneath a dental clinic on Oxford Street near Adelaide where we would settle for the next five years.

Mrs. Fluter, future foundress of London's Holy Cross Romanian Church, was working at this time with Rumanian immigrants just arriving in London. She arranged for their congregation to rent our space on Oxford Street for worship over the next few months, which made it possible for some of us to pray the Divine Liturgy on Sunday in our own space.

As Christmas approached Adnan Chehade called to say that he could get the Antiochian priest from Toronto, Fr. Joseph Rahal, to come to us on Christmas day so that we might have a Christmas Liturgy, which he did. It was after

this visit that Fr. Joseph prevailed upon the Archdiocese to provide us with full-time priest who finally arrived at the end of August, 1990.

Fr. Maximos Sakeley, a truly devoted priest who had just arrived from Lebanon with his family, impressed us with his piety and devotion. Unfortunately, with English as his second language, the English-language nature of our situation was bound to pose problems for all of us. A large group of new Arabic-speaking people, not all of whom were even Orthodox, suddenly appeared, assuming the parish would become an Arabic language church. Fr. Maximos, however, in January, adamantly insisted that Dr. Bush must once again serve as Parish Council Chairman, recognizing that the mission would be on slippery grounds if it departed from its English and pan-Orthodox mission.

Our large Greek element, who had never questioned our existence as an English-speaking mission, moreover refused to accept even token Arabic and disappeared. With the Bishop's blessing a second Liturgy on Sundays was celebrated in Arabic, vainly hoping that this special effort by Fr. Maximos might bring in firmer support. Unfortunately it was not so. In August of 1991, at the end of the church year, this very painful situation was resolved when Fr. Maximos was transferred to Halifax.

Fr. David Smith, a recent convert and former fundamentalist Evangelical pastor replaced him. Fr. David and his family would be with us for six years and, as it were, finally put us on the map: first as a mission, then as a new parish in the Antiochian Archdiocese. It was under him that we finally acquired our Lambeth property.

Fr. David felt our pattern of paying rent to the dental clinic must be broken and insisted we move out within a few months of his arrival. A small chapel with the Holy Mysteries on the altar was set up in a very modest room on English St. There we sang Saturday Vespers and week-day services. On Sundays however we rented the church hall of the Anglican Church of the Epiphany, unpacking and repacking boxes of icons and candles etc., and setting up and taking down dozens of chairs each Sunday. I recall Dimitri Dimitroulis at the end of each service smilingly taking up his position before the little closet Fr. David had been allowed to build in the basement to house our materials. Only Dimitri held the secret of how everything could be fitted into that tiny space each week.

In September of that year a great friend of our mission, Fr. John Meyendorff died at age 66. I had known him in 1958 as a graduate student in Paris, and had come to rely on his wisdom and guidance during my ten-year wait to become Orthodox and afterward. I felt assured that now he would help us before God. Indeed, almost immediately after his early death, the former Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall in Lambeth, set on a beautiful lot with old trees, was made available to us at a price we could afford.

Both Fr. David and Presbytera Donna were obliged to work part-time in order to support their family as they strove to bring about that much-needed stability and leadership we so desperately needed. They healed rifts and did magnificent work with the parish young people. This latter work was crowned that first year at the Antiochian Convention where Nesreen Bahbah received the top oratorical prize, thereby putting our mission on the Antiochian map, both in Canada and in the U.S.

Fr. David also brought in a number of converts, two of whom he actually baptized in "living water" on the edge of our property in Dingman's Creek. Our much-loved Subdeacon Polycarp Gilbert with his wife Pulcheria were both received by Holy Chrismation from Fr. David. But perhaps the most unique event taking place at that point was Fr. David's arranging for our first episcopal visit. In 1996, the year before his departure, he invited Bishop Antoun to be with us for an Evening Divine Liturgy followed by a gala dinner at Bill Tsiropoulos's restaurant. Finally, during Fr. David's six years, it also seemed appropriate that Elder Ephraim, during a visit to London, on a very snowy morning, had himself driven out to Lambeth to see our property, inspect our church, and renew his blessings on our efforts to make Orthodoxy available for everyone.

Obliged by the health of his aging parents to be nearer Syracuse, Fr. David left in August of 1997 for the parish in Utica, New York. His scheduled replacement fell ill, unfortunately. So it was that Fr. Mark Schram of Toronto, who had been attached to our parish for some time and with his family was a frequent visitor, was assigned to fill in. Hope that he might become a full-time replacement for Fr. David was quickly shattered however when he announced that his family could not afford to move to London from Markham since they were dependent upon his wife's work there. Father Mark however did faithfully commute from Toronto to serve us from 1997 to 1999.

In August of 1999, Fr. Gregory Heers from California was assigned us as our permanent, full-time priest. By some sweet miracle we have found ourselves able to pay the bills and have been truly blessed as Fr. Gregory and Presbytera Catherine continue to give of themselves so completely to further our little Orthodox community. A recent increase in the number of Ethiopians in our midst, plus new immigration from the Middle East, continue not only to enrich us, but also to challenge our western Christian converts to understand that Orthodoxy is one, as it preserves the fullness of Christ. That fullness of Christ lies in Him alone and always beyond ethnic identity, something already understood by those Russians and Greeks in that 1917 photograph of London's first Holy Transfiguration Church.

--William BUSH