



“ORTHODOX 9” PARISHES BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CANADA

Monthly Newsletter for the family of Orthodox Churches including:



St. Mary’s (the Nativity of the Holy Virgin) - NISKU

Sts. Peter & Paul - BONNYVILLE

St. John the Baptist - HOREN

Holy Ascension - CALMAR

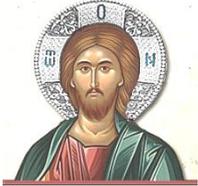
St. Onuphrius - FOAM LAKE (SK)

Whitsuntide (Holy Trinity) - THORSBY

Dormition of Theotokos -MACNUTT (SK)

St. John the Baptist - VEGREVILLE

Sts. Peter & Paul - INSINGER (SK)



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July 12 – Peter and Paul, Foremost of the Apostles



The Orthodox Church calls the holy apostles Peter and Paul Foremost of the Apostles. They are distinguished by this honorable title because they particularly labored in spreading Christ's teachings among pagan nations and demonstrated the highest examples of devotion and love for the Divine Teacher and His work on earth.

Constantly supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit, they converted thousands of people to Christ, silenced the mouths of the wise men of this world, and stirred and subdued human hearts through their preaching. Let us recall how many troubles and sorrows they endured. "I think," writes the holy Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, "God has displayed us, the apostles, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world... We hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless... Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure... we have been made as the filth of the world, like dust, which everyone tramples to this day" (1 Corinthians 4:9–13).

The holy Apostle Peter showed his love and devotion to the Lord even during the earthly life of the Savior. Before his apostolic calling, he was named Simon and lived in the Galilean town of Bethsaida. The Lord renamed the new disciple Cephas, which in Aramaic means "stone," "rock." In Greek, this corresponds to "Petros" or "Petra." From that moment, the newly converted apostle became an ardent follower of Christ, His disciple, and constant companion.

(the continuation – on page 2)

Peter's selfless love for Christ opened to him God's providence. He was the first to confess Jesus as the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16). Hearing the news after the Resurrection of the Lord, he was the first to run to Christ's tomb and later said to Him: "Lord, You know that I love You" (John 21:16). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter was the first among the apostles to loudly preach faith in Christ, converting many Gentiles and Jews to the Christian faith. Apostle Peter ended his life in martyrdom on a cross, testifying with his blood his devotion to the words of Christ.

Throughout the history of the Universal Church, there is hardly another person as renowned in the Christian world as Saint Paul. Before his call to evangelical service, he was known as Saul and was a zealous guardian of Pharisaic laws. Christ Himself transformed him from the "old man" into a "new" person and enlightened him with the light of truth. From then on, Saul ceased to exist, and Paul appeared—this "chosen vessel" of God and the second foremost apostle.

Paul conducted his apostolic ministry under God's direct and visible guidance. "But I want you to know, brethren," writes the apostle to the Galatians, "that the Gospel... I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11–12). The power of Paul's preaching was immense, and he greatly labored to spread the Christian faith. Apostle Paul did not personally see Christ nor was he among His disciples during Christ's earthly life, but through his enlightened, clear, and versatile mind, he forever recognized that Christ is truly the promised Messiah who came to save the entire human race, and whoever is in Christ is a new creation, a new person. Apostle Paul also received the crown of martyrdom, although, unlike Apostle Peter, he was not crucified but was beheaded by the sword as a Roman citizen.

Great was the reward of the foremost apostles even during their earthly lives. Saint Apostle Peter was honored to witness the most important events in the life of Christ the Savior—the prayer in Gethsemane and the Divine Glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Saint Apostle Paul was granted the experience of being caught up to the third heaven, as he himself described it, to paradise, where he heard inexpressible words that a person is unable to utter.

Before us stand people, who teach us through their lives: if you have sinned—repent; if you have fallen—rise; if you have shown weakness—strengthen yourself with hope in God, believe in Him, and love Him. Such a path of righteous life in our Lord Jesus Christ will lead us to inherit eternal life.

The word "apostle" translates from Greek as "messenger." All of us are sent by God into this world to comprehend eternal truth and witness to it through our being and life—that is, to live according to God's commandments and divine law. This bonds us with all the holy apostles, especially with the foremost apostles, whom the Church honors on [Saturday and Sunday this year - Synaxis of the Holy, Glorious, and All-Praised Twelve Apostles*].

His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir (†2014, Jul.5), 2004



***The Synaxis (or the Assembly) of the Glorious and All-Praiseworthy Twelve Apostles of Christ** appears to be an ancient Feast.

The Church honors each of the Twelve Apostles on separate dates during the year, and has established a general commemoration for all of them on the day after the commemoration of the Glorious and First-Ranked among the Apostles Peter and Paul.

The holy God-crowned Emperor Constantine the Great (May 21) built a church in Constantinople in honor of the Twelve Apostles. There are instructions for celebrating this Feast which date from the fourth century. For the lists of the Apostles' names, see: Mt.10:2, Mark 3:14, Luke 6:12, Acts 1:13, 26.

Saint Olga, Matushka of All Alaska

An Account of Her Life and June of 2025 Glorification



A Historic Moment on the Kuskokwim

On 19-20 June 2025 the village of Kwethluk, Alaska (pop. ≈800) became the liturgical center of the Orthodox Church in America. There, before hundreds of pilgrims who had come by riverboat and small plane, the humble Yup'ik midwife Ol'ga (Arrsamquq) Michael—affectionately known for decades as *Matushka* (“little mother”) Olga—was formally proclaimed **St Olga, Matushka of All Alaska**.

It was the first canonization held in Alaska since St Herman of Kodiak (1970) and the first time any woman from North America—and any Yup'ik person—was numbered among the saints.

Early Life in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Born 3 February 1916 in the remote delta village of Kwethluk, Olinka Arrsamquq grew up in a subsistence culture shaped by river fishing, trapping, and seasonal migrations. In 1935 she married Nikolai Michael, a local storekeeper who was later ordained a Russian-Orthodox priest. Together they served the string of river parishes scattered along the Kuskokwim.

Of their 13 children, eight survived to adulthood—no small feat in a landscape where medical help was days away and winter temperatures routinely fell below $-40\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. Olga herself delivered many of her babies at home, knowledge that later helped her serve as an informal village midwife.

“A Helper in Afflictions”—Ministry and Character

Those who remember her speak first of a quiet, almost intuitive compassion. Olga sewed *mukluks*, parkas, and children's clothes out of caribou hide and cotton calico, giving away most of what she made; neighbours recall that her own children sometimes received hand-me-downs only after she had outfitted poorer families.

Women confided in her about domestic violence or sexual assault—subjects rarely discussed in public Yup'ik culture—and many later testified that she could *tell* a woman was pregnant even before the woman herself was sure. In every account, the same traits re-appear: humility, gentleness, an ability to “see the heart.”

Falling Asleep in the Lord and Early Signs of Sanctity

Diagnosed with cancer, Matushka Olga reposed on 8 November 1979 at age 63. Even her funeral bore the mark of what local faithful call “**little miracles.**” A mid-winter thaw briefly softened the frozen ground so villagers from up-river could travel to Kwethluk, and the burial crew found the soil unexpectedly thawed. As the coffin left the church, a flock of birds—long since migrated south—circled overhead, then disappeared when the last prayers were said. Stories like these, passed quietly from home to home, formed the seed of grassroots veneration.



Grass-roots Veneration and the Road to Canonization

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Yup'ik families painted small icons of “Mother Olga,” often showing her in a brightly patterned *kuspuk* and holding a basin of water—the midwife’s sign of service. Reports spread of women elsewhere in North America who saw Olga in dreams and found healing from trauma. By 2020 the Church received dozens of written testimonies, prompting a formal investigation. On 9 November 2023 the Holy Synod unanimously voted to canonize her, assigning **27 October** as her annual feast and scheduling the liturgical “glorification” for June 2025 so that Western-Alaska river travel would be possible.

Preparing a Village for 300 Pilgrims



Turning Kwethluk into a pilgrimage hub required months of planning. Volunteers built a temporary dock, laid plywood walkways across tundra mud, wired the church for livestreaming via Starlink, and trucked in water tanks to counter the unseasonable 70 °F (21 °C) heat. Local families smoked hundreds of whitefish, baked cinnamon rolls, and prepared *akutaq* (“Eskimo ice-cream”) to feed visitors. Meanwhile, Orthodox nuns in California carved a simple pine casket—etched with tundra berries—in which Olga’s relics would rest after they were reverently transferred from her original coffin during an “**uncovering**” service in Nov. 2024.

Saint Olga of Alaska, pray for us!

oca.org; adn.com; kyuk.org; oca.org
(the continuation – in the bulletin to follow)

VICTIMS OF TERRORISM: HAS THE TIME COME FOR THE CHURCH TO RECOGNIZE THEIR SAINTHOOD?

On Sunday, June 22, 2025, as the Greek Orthodox Church of Mar Elias in Dweilaa, Damascus welcomed its congregation during the evening Divine Liturgy, a terrifying scene interrupted the prayers: a suicide bomber blew himself up inside the church and the criminals accompanying him opened fire on the faithful in the house of God.



The scene is not new to the Christians of Antioch and All the East. This sort of bloodthirsty targeting has

become a tragic part of their reality, recurring time and again, and with each recurrence there come canned statements of international condemnation which fail to prevent death, preserve life, or deter aggressors.

But what is more painful than the crime itself is that the martyrs are generally buried amidst official silence, without explicit recognition of their martyrdom by the Church. The churches hesitate, refrain and avoid declaring the sainthood of these martyrs. They avoid describing their martyrdom as it really is: dying for the sake of the faith, being systematically targeted because of their Christian identity, in an atmosphere of rampant religious terrorism.

This hesitancy might be due to fear of further violence, out of a desire to preserve a fragile “coexistence,” or out of complex political concerns. But, before this blood spilled on the altar of prayer, there is no place for courtesy or ambiguity. The blood of the innocent, which has been mixed with oil, incense and the Eucharist, which has covered icons and walls, allows for no equivocation. It cries out demanding truth, recognition and dignity.

Martyrs, as Metropolitan Georges (Khodr) says, “do not need human testimony. Their blood attests that the Spirit is in them. Through love they have transcended the body of dust and have become pillars of light. God will not judge them on the Last Day. They have passed through judgment into glory. They do not need a human statement to reveal their power. If we declare their sainthood, we only do so out of obedience to the One of whom they are worthy. They are in the company of Christ, as Paul says. They have hope for the highest glory in what Orthodox theology calls paradise. However, only the martyr crosses all the heavens and settles on the thrones of glory. We belong to him as he belongs to Christ.”

Therefore, the Antiochian Church is called today to take a bold and prophetic step. The time has come for the Holy Synod to declare the sainthood of these martyrs and those who preceded them along the same path, and to recognize them as “martyrs of religious extremist terrorism.”

In this context, it is likewise requested of the Christian churches in the Middle East to rise above their differences, having been united by the martyrdom of blood, and to designate a common feast for all the Christian martyrs who have fallen because of religious terrorism throughout the Middle East.

Such a recognition is not intended to stir up resentment or fuel hatred. Rather, it is an act of truth and justice, an expression of loyalty to those who “loved unto death,” and proof that the Church, despite her wounds, still preserves the deposit of the martyrs, repeating with every new generation, “Blood is not forgotten and holiness is not defeated.”

The martyrs who fell in the Church of Mar Elias, like other martyrs, were not killed randomly, but because they were praying in Christ’s name. This alone is enough for us to raise up their icons, to seek their intercession along with the saints, and to cite as examples when the history of the Church is recounted, ever defeating death by faith, defeating hatred and malice by love.

Profound Gratitude for Restoring the Tomb Crosses at St. Mary's Cemetery in Nisku

This spring, due a coordinated effort of **St. Mary's Parish Council** and the **Orthodox Fellowship Club of St. Barbara's Cathedral (Edmonton)**, two more graves that suffered vandalism in 2023 were restored – the one (beside the bishop Panteleimon's) of Hieromonk Mefody and the servant of God Peter Sych.

Thank you, St. Mary's Parish Council and the Family of President David Borys, Orthodox Fellowship Club of St. Barbara's Cathedral and the President Roman Lopushinsky, the dean and the rector of St. Barbara's Cathedral Father Igor Kisil, the servants of God Roman and Maria Shapka, and the masonry master Don Zaleschuk (www.done-with-pride.com), who performed the restoration



with the grounds trimming, as well as every volunteer whose hands steadied a stone or lifted a prayer.

Let this achievement inspire the final phase: refurbishing the remaining stones across the cemetery. We invite skilled tradespeople, donors, and prayerful supporters to join us so that, in time, every cross at St. Mary's will stand firm—unchipped, upright, and gleaming—bearing silent witness to the hope of the Resurrection.

May the Lord, through the intercessions of our righteous ancestors, reward your generosity a hundred-fold!

Heartfelt Thanks to Darcy Doblanko



The Parish Council and faithful parishioners of St. Mary's Church at Nisku extend their profound gratitude to Darcy Doblanko for his swift response and dedicated service during a recent electrical emergency at our church and hall.

Upon receiving an alarm notification early on a Sunday morning (June 15) indicating a critical power issue, he promptly assessed the situation, identifying severe electrical damage that required immediate intervention, then swiftly coordinated emergency repairs with EPCOR and secured the necessary permits from the City of Edmonton.

Through his expertise, power was rapidly restored to both the church and the hall, and the new equipment was installed, ensuring continuity of essential services and safeguarding the church's facilities.

With heartfelt gratitude,

The Parish Council and Faithful of St. Mary's Church at Nisku



July 12, we celebrate the great feast of the Leaders of the Apostles – St. Peter and Paul. They changed the life of the whole universe, but first, they had to change their own lives with the help and power of God.

Peter was originally called Simon, but Jesus gave him a new name, Peter, which means "rock." Jesus gave him this name because Simon expressed strong faith by saying to Jesus, "You are Christ, Son of the Living God!" His faith was firm, like a rock, and became the foundation of our Christian faith.

Paul was first known as Saul, did not believe in Jesus, and tried to stop people from

following Jesus. He belonged to a very proud group called the Pharisees, who didn't understand the meekness and forgiveness taught by Jesus. But one day, as Saul traveled to Damascus, a bright light suddenly shone around him. It was a miracle! Jesus Himself spoke to Saul. Saul became blind and had to be guided into the city. God chose a kind man named Ananias to help Saul. When Ananias prayed for Saul, another miracle happened: Saul regained his sight! From that moment on, Saul changed completely. He believed in Jesus, became His follower, and took a new, humble name: Paul, which means "little one."

Let's celebrate these great saints today by remembering how God changed their lives and their names, helping them become leaders and heroes of our faith!

Saul Becomes Paul

TIC-TAC-TOE

Acts 9:5-6 (NIV)
 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Word Search

B	L	I	N	D	N	E	S	S	H	T	S
L	U	A	P	V	C	H	O	S	E	N	U
U	M	Z	N	X	A	N	A	N	I	A	S
A	P	B	F	L	M	I	R	A	C	L	E
S	I	G	H	T	R	Y	H	S	R	D	J

- JESUS • BLINDNESS • SIGHT
- ANANIAS • SAUL • PAUL
- CHOSEN • MIRACLE

DAMASCUS

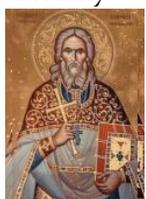
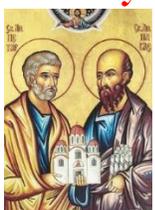
WORD SCRAMBLE

- AULP
- UASL
- DLIBN
- LGTTH

how many do you see: _____

Can you trace Saul's path to Damascus?

July 2025

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		<u>1</u> Canada Day 	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> Hieromartyr Methodius, bishop of Patara 	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> 1:00 pm - Grave Yard Service at Tomahawk
<u>6</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy – NISKU and the Annual Church Picnic	<u>7</u> Nativity of St. John the Baptist 	<u>8</u> Virgin-martyr Febronia 	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> Hieromartyr Gregory Nikolsky 	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> St. Peter and Paul Day 
<u>13</u> Divine Liturgy in Regina Synaxis of the Holy, Glorious, and All-Praised Twelve Apostles	<u>14</u> St. Angelina (Brancovic), despotina of Serbia 	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> Martyr Hyacinth of Caesarea in Cappadocia 	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> New Martyrs Abbess Elizabeth (Romanova) and Barbara 	<u>19</u>
<u>20</u> 10:00 am – Divine Liturgy at St. Barbara’s Cathedral	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> St. Gabriel of Athos 	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> Blessed Equal-to-the-Apostles Olga 	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel 
<u>27</u> 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy – NISKU Departure to the Camp	<u>28</u> Equal-to-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir 	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u> Great-martyr Marina (Margaret) 	<u>31</u>		