

# HISTORY OF ST. JOHN THE WONDERWORKER ORTHODOX CHURCH EUGENE, OREGON 1991-2016

## I. The Genesis of a Mission

St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church began in May of 1991 as the St. Paul the Apostle Eastern Orthodox Mission. Two families – the Lubliners and the Dyers – moved to Eugene in order to share Orthodox Christian spirituality within this, the second largest of Oregon's metropolitan areas. Fr. David Lubliner had wanted to leave Atlanta, Georgia in order to start a mission. After researching possibilities, by 1988 he decided on Eugene, which was two hours south of where he had grown up in Portland; his parents were still in Portland and Eugene did not have an Orthodox priest (there was a Greek Orthodox mission without a priest in Eugene at the time, but the Lubliners and Dyers would only become aware of it after their move to Eugene in 1991, a mere few months after it was first assigned a priest; this mission would later be dedicated to the Great-martyr George). In 1989, he petitioned his diocesan authority to begin a mission there, which was granted. It took two years to complete the preparations to accomplish the move to Eugene.

Eugene's distinctive culture unites the legacy of a pioneer logging town with the political influence of the University of Oregon (estab. 1876) in a kind of cultural fault line: rugged individualism and a rural sensibility adjoin activist politics (Eugene was called the "Berkeley of the North" in the sixties and seventies) and carnival sensuality (which became tribalism and anarchism in the 1990s). The culture emerging from these rough edges was ripe for Orthodox

Christianity – which is both ultra-traditional and ultra-radical in its veneration of Jesus Christ and His teachings. Orthodox Christianity bridges Eugene’s fault line with a spiritual path deeply rooted in a two thousand-year heritage of radical traditionalism.

The Lubliners moved from Atlanta, crossing the country in two vehicles: Fr. David bringing one child and driving a U-Haul and Presvytera Esther driving a Dodge Caravan with their other two children (they would have two more children in Eugene). Fr. David brought with him his bathroom and kitchen resurfacing business (Color Coordinators) that he had started in Atlanta. This profession gave him the flexibility and means to establish and support a mission. The Lubliners planned to finance their move and cover start-up costs for the mission by purchasing a beautiful but rundown large craftsman-style house across from Grant Park in Atlanta, restoring, and then selling it. They purchased the house and spent two years with the restoration; however, they had to leave Atlanta with it unsold because it went on the market the very week that the Persian Gulf War began in January 1991, at which point the housing market slowed to a standstill. The Atlanta house would not sell for a year-and-a-half, but when it did, the timing providentially assisted the fledgling Eugene mission.

During the Lubliner’s two years of preparation for the move, the Dyers became aware of the intention to start a mission in Eugene. The two families knew each other from years before, but did not know each other well; the families conferred by phone while they were still across the country from one another. Stephen and Irene Dyer had both been involved in Christian mission work their entire adult lives; Stephen moved to Portland from Boston in 1986 with the desire to be actively involved in a Christian mission. He and Irene, who were married in Portland, helped

both at [Holy Apostles Orthodox Mission](#) in Portland (now in Vancouver, Washington), where Stephen was a reader, and [Church of the Annunciation](#) in Milwaukie, Oregon, but they desired to be more involved in a mission from the ground up. When V. Rev. Archpriest Nicholas Letten told Stephen that Fr. David would be starting a mission in Eugene, the couple visited Eugene, found it a nice place, and Stephen sent out resumes. He was hired by Temple Construction and the Dyers moved down to Eugene from Portland with their son on May 1<sup>st</sup>; the Lubliners arrived May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1991. The Dyers would eventually raise three children in Eugene. Within a year, Stephen started his own business in Eugene (Dyer Remodeling). Later, he developed an expertise installing skylights and produced the Eugene-Springfield area's foremost skylight business (Dyer Skylights). Being a self-employed contractor, he could make his own hours in order to help with the mission and be available for services on Saturday night, Sunday, and Feast days.

## **II. A Moving Tabernacle in the Wilderness**

The two families had “high hopes” as they began the mission with prayers in the living room of the Lubliner's rented Eugene home, with Fr. David serving as priest and Stephen serving as the mission's first reader. The mission was assisted with a \$5000 startup grant from Christ the Saviour Brotherhood (CSB) (1988-2016), an Orthodox Christian affiliation to which Fr. David and Stephen Dyer belonged. CSB developed out of the Holy Order of MANS, a non-Orthodox Christian religious order of the 1960s and 1970s. Most members of CSB were part of a non-canonical Orthodox Christian jurisdiction from 1988 to 2000, at which point members who had not already joined canonical jurisdictions did so.

Fr. David moved quickly to rent a store at 755 Washington St. in Eugene and to open [Pilgrim's](#)

[Way Bookstore](#) in January 1992. Fr. David used bookshelves and display cases that he had made in Atlanta and brought in the U-Haul in anticipation of opening a bookstore. To assist with the set-up, Fr. Nicholas Letten and Rev. Deacon Michael Isenberg, both of Holy Apostles Mission in Portland, traveled down to Eugene. Pilgrim's Way sold Orthodox Christian books and icons and was the nexus for classes, guest speakers, and a Friday night "Pilgrim's Mystical Hangout" from 7 pm to midnight, where wanderers and guests from off the street would be treated to coffee, refreshments, and engaging conversation.

Few – very few – people visited; on an average "good day," two people might pass through in order to look at the unusual "art" or hear tapes of Byzantine chant. The proximity of the Washington St. store to the I-105 freeway on-ramp made it a poor location for foot traffic. Despite the lack of patrons, the missionaries shared fellowship with the saints while frequently praying akathists, canons, and the All-night Vigil on Saturday evenings.

Classes began in the bookstore in a humble way. A notice was put in the paper that a public talk would be given on [St. Seraphim of Sarov](#). Fr. David and Stephen Dyer gave the talk. There was only one person who attended on that icy, winter day. She was invited to attend services as well; she not only joined the families in prayer, but was later baptized by Fr. David with the name Seraphima, receiving St. Seraphim as her patron saint. Seraphima was the first of many future parishioners to join the Lubliners and Dyers. The bookstore had a chapel dedicated to St. Paul the Apostle in the back of the store and Seraphima remembers that, "since it was so small at that time, people sat on the floor."

One pivotal encounter in the early history of the mission occurred in the autumn of 1992 at Smith Family Bookstore near the University. Fr. David heard very distinctly a voice saying, “If you want to grow, go to the Smith Family Bookstore today, right now.” So he did. While in the bookstore, he noticed a man looking at spiritual books. He said to him, “Nothing good here.” The man asked, “Where do I find good books?” Fr. David answered, “Follow me.” Together they drove to the Washington St. Pilgrim's Way Bookstore. This man – who along with his daughter was baptized by Fr. David on Holy Thursday of 1993 in the University Millpond – was the future Monk Symeon. A personable and outgoing man with both carpentry and building skills and a charismatic gift with people, he was a great help for developing the parish in the years ahead, both spiritually and physically. He had a heart for monasticism and Orthodox ascetic spirituality, a studiousness with regard to the [Divine Services](#), and a willingness to volunteer long hours at the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore, all of which made him an early stalwart. He raised his daughter in Eugene and she eventually became a nun.

In order to assist with the baptisms of Fr. Symeon and his daughter, (then Deacon now Archpriest) Michael Boyle, Matushka Magdalena, and their children traveled down to Eugene from Milwaukie. While visiting Eugene, they were able to visit the church's new location. Just before the baptisms, in early 1993, after thirteen months at the Washington St. location, both the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore and chapel were moved closer to the University at 133 E. 13th Ave. in time for Pascha (April 11, 1993), which was the first Pascha for the mission in Eugene, given that the Lubliners and Dyers had celebrated Pascha in 1992 at Church of the Annunciation in Milwaukie, Oregon.

The move to the “13th Street” location was pivotal because its proximity to Downtown and the University permitted many different kinds of people to encounter Orthodox Christianity. The mission resolved to open its doors and receive in the Lord’s name all who entered, offering refreshment and Christian hospitality. Visitors entered into a bookstore filled with ancient Christian liturgical chant, fragrant incense, icons, spiritual books, hot coffee, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the hungry. The bookstore at 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. featured a 13’ x 15’ chapel that could be expanded to 13’ x 22’ by moving a wall on tracks that enlarged the space for weekend services. University students, street kids, professionals, seekers, and whole families entered. Some stayed for a day; some remained.

Not unlike the Tabernacle of Witness that migrated throughout the wilderness, the Altar Table was set up first in the living rooms of the Lubliner’s homes (for the first four months their rental was on 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Charnelton St. before they moved to Ferry St. for four months, and then to Springfield), then a couple different storefronts at the Washington St. and 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. locations; the Altar Table was taken down and re-erected with each move until the fellowship arrived at a God-appointed time and place ([Ex. 40: 36-37](#)) for a permanent place of worship.

A satellite location that figured into the history of the community was a four-acre property in rural Crow, Oregon that the Lubliners had first looked at in February of 1993. Only a half-hour drive from Eugene, it would be a perfect site around which to gather a community of Orthodox Christians, given that it had three houses on the property (a fourth would later be converted by Fr. Symeon from an old out-building), a large garden area, trees, a creek, and proximity to the city. However, their home in Atlanta had still not sold, so they had no money to purchase the

property.

Then, right before Pascha, the Atlanta realtor received an offer on the Lubliner house, well below the asking price but including partial movie rights to an obscure Rock Hudson film. He suggested that he host another open house the next weekend, which was Pascha. At that open house, a neighbor came in, fell in love with the place, and made a full-price, all-cash offer with closing in one month. The profit from that house provided the down payment on the Crow property. The Lubliners would not have otherwise been able to qualify for a loan, but they were receiving monthly payments for the business Fr. David had sold in Atlanta. When combined with his work for Color Coordinators, they were able to qualify for a loan and purchase the property. Interestingly, a month after they closed on the Crow property, the buyer of the Atlanta business declared bankruptcy (he eventually re-started the business with a different name) and defaulted on the loan. Thus began the continual unfolding of God's financial care for His faithful in Eugene, as He always provided enough to meet obligations and keep food on the table, but not so much as to get comfortable. His providential care also provided a good lesson in charity and forgiveness.

In October of 1993, on his way to class from the Westmoreland apartments in West Eugene, an Environmental Studies graduate student at the University of Oregon, a recent arrival with his family from Moscow, Mikhail (Misha) Blinnikov, saw the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore at its new location on 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. He noted the bookstore's location, given that it was closed at the time. Only having moved to Eugene a month earlier, he was aware that the city had a couple Orthodox missions, but he did not realize that this bookstore before him was the St. Paul the Apostle

Mission that he knew about from the Yellow Pages. A few weeks later in early November, he saw a priest standing in the bookstore's doorway. He stopped his bike and ran to get a blessing. Hesitant to bother him but desiring to learn more, he thought of a good excuse to ask to come in, saying that he needed to purchase a baptismal cross. Fr. David, of course, invited him in for a cup of coffee. Once inside, Misha asked Fr. David about Fr. Seraphim Rose, whose books he and his wife, Irina, had read in Russia and who had an immense influence on both of them as they were learning about the Church. Misha and Irina were among many Russians who joined the Church around the time of the one-thousandth anniversary of Russia's Baptism (1988), which was celebrated even as the Soviet Union was collapsing. He and Irina were baptized independently of each other in 1990 before marrying.

Misha knew that the monastery of the American monk, Fr. Seraphim, was somewhere in northern California, but he wanted to know more. Fr. David, hearing that, smiled and said that God brought him because, as he put it, "we are the only people in Eugene who know exactly where that monastery is." He told Misha that one of Fr. Seraphim's friends was his spiritual adviser. Misha learned at a different meeting that this was Fr. Herman. The Blinnikovs joined the St. Paul Mission. Over the years, other parishioners who moved to Eugene and joined the church also initially arrived through their connection to the University of Oregon. A number of University professors and faculty would join the St. John the Wonderworker community, many from the Department of Mathematics. Many of those from the University were *émigrés* from Russia, Belarus, or Ukraine who had been raised in atheist Soviet Union but were among the first generation to return to Orthodox Christianity in the wake of *glasnost* and the Soviet Union's collapse.

In the early years, Fr. David, like many in CSB, received spiritual counsel from Monk Herman Podmoshensky (1934-2014), then abbot of [St. Herman of Alaska Monastery](#) in Platina, California where [Hieromonk Seraphim \(Rose\)](#) (1934-1982) had lived. After his father was sent to a Communist prison camp where he later died, Fr. Herman – a Latvian – fled Latvia to Germany with his mother and sister when he was five. When fourteen, his family immigrated to Boston. In America, he met a remnant of faithful refugees from Holy Russia, many connected with the legacy of [Optina Monastery](#), which had greatly contributed to the spiritual revitalization of Russia in the nineteenth century. Fr. Herman was an inexhaustible dynamo and gifted catechist because he passed on his connection with Optina to those whom he taught. Further, he transmitted an old-world mindset that cut through the contortions of modern thought and communicated the immediacy, love, and radicalness of Christ in a way that touched an elemental quality in the soul. He employed his zeal for missionary work in teaching members of CSB as they transitioned to Orthodox Christianity from 1984 to 1988, all the while continuing to serve as abbot and priest after being suspended by his bishop in 1984. He claimed that he was serving under a new bishop and would actively defend his position if pressed; this posture worked (for a while) with those who were brand new to Orthodox Christianity and unfamiliar with the seriousness of monastic disobedience. Even as he was teaching them about the Faith, Fr. Herman was defrocked by the Russian Synod of bishops for disobedience after failing to answer an ecclesial court summoned to investigate charges of moral failings, a decision announced on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1988. Most of the members of CSB did not realize this because Fr. Herman continued to serve as priest, abbot, and spiritual father, putting himself above censure of the Church. He would only be forcibly retired by his monks, nuns, and spiritual children years later when the

truth about his disobedience and fall emerged. This would be a challenging time for those who knew Fr. Herman, but the riches of God's grace and the love that He has for His Church saw people through as they were reconciled with the Church and its canonical, God-appointed, bishops.

### III. "The Apostles Gathered Themselves Together unto Jesus" ([Mark 6:30](#))

In Crow, a small Orthodox Christian community dedicated to the [Protection of the Mother of God](#) gathered around the Lubliners. Fr. Symeon converted a small hay barn into a chapel dedicated to [St. Evgenia of Rome](#). Three other Orthodox families from the parish rented homes on the property and prayed Divine Services in the chapel during the week. The main house had a converted garage dedicated to [St. Herman of Alaska](#) (St. Herman's Room) that was used to host guest speakers for the spiritual enrichment of the St. Paul the Apostle Mission; in all, nearly a dozen weekend seminars and also an icon-painting workshop by [Nun Katherine](#) of Indianapolis were hosted in St. Herman's Room. The Protection of the Mother of God community served as a retreat for parishioners in the city and it became the "seedbed of hospitality for the mission" (Fr. David). Converts to the Church as well as families from ethnic Orthodox backgrounds joined the mission and a sense of community developed as they discovered the Church's rich liturgical life and spiritual life together.

The vibrant homeschooling community in Eugene also became the means through which a number of families encountered the Faith, mostly through relationships they established with Presvytera Esther, who was homeschooling the Lubliner children. The Sumstines, who would become pivotal early members, were baptized after having first met Presvytera through the

homeschooling network. “Entering the Orthodox Church for the first time,” writes Elizabeth Sumstine, “was strangely foreign and yet familiar. Although completely outside our experience, the solemn beauty, the peace-filled chanting of familiar Scriptures, the flickering candles and scent of incense all melded with the vibrant presence of God that permeated the little chapel, brought us into a place of peace and whispered ‘home’.” Of the Lubliners, she remembers, “We loved the Lubliners; could see their Christianity in action, and knew the Orthodox Church really was viable Christianity regardless of what modern culture stated.”

In homeschool classes held at the Protection of the Mother of God community in Crow, Elizabeth taught literature and directed plays. There were biology classes (taught by Georgina), writing and vocabulary-building lessons drawn from *English from the Roots Up*, taught by Sara (Stanley) Baz, and other classes for the children of the community (Lubliner, Dyer, Mead, Sumstine, and Baz children along with Fr. Symeon’s daughter) and a neighborhood girl from Crow.

Later, in the 2000s, the St. John the Wonderworker Church, which at the time had five or six homeschool families (including newer arrivals the Boyles and the Merritts), would sponsor St. Nikolai Academy, an association of parents and educators who taught home-schooled children in a one-room schoolhouse on the church property. It was an idea that developed from homeschooling in Crow. At St. Nikolai, high school students studied biology, Shakespeare, and world literature. Younger students learned about the lives of saints, science, and music. The first homeschool graduation was conducted at the church. A number of Roman Catholic families who also joined in this endeavor later continued with it a decade after St. John’s involvement.

One of the families to join the Lubliners in Crow were the Meads, who were introduced to the Orthodox Church by their friends the Hoffmans, attending their first Divine Liturgy on February 13, 1994 at the Church of the Annunciation in Milwaukie, Oregon; the following week they visited the St. Paul the Apostle Mission in Eugene for the first time. After that Liturgy, their fifteen-year-old son Joshua declared, “This is the church I am going to attend. We have never been to a church where they worship God as they do here.” The following week, in their first visit with the Lubliners at the Crow property, the Meads were surprised to meet their friends and fellow homeschoolers, the Sumstines, who were also exploring Orthodox Christianity. Peter Mead comments on his family’s passage into the Orthodox Church: “Our family was laying aside many of the simple formulae of Evangelical Christianity, but had nothing to replace them until Orthodoxy made the joyful way of salvation possible for us. It took many years for me to see that this process of salvation was so much more than a great idea, and our souls so much greater than our minds.”

Not only were the Hoffmans, the Sumstines, and the Meads looking into Orthodox Christianity at the same time, but their friends – the Baz family – was as well. The Baz family strongly felt the pull to join the church because they could see in the Orthodox Church the vision of God bigger than any particular person’s interpretation of Him. Nicholas Baz’s heritage was Lebanese and his ancestors were Orthodox Christians; he and his wife Sara strongly felt as if his dearly-departed paternal grandmother Anna, herself a devout Orthodox Christian, was praying for them to enter the Orthodox Church.

The Hoffman family was baptized on Pentecost in 1994 at Church of the Annunciation in Milwaukie, the Mead family was baptized on the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God in August of 1994 in Crow and, soon after them, Nicholas and Sara (Stanley) Baz and their two youngest (of six) children were also baptized in Crow on Pentecost in 1995. The Sumstines would later be baptized at the St. Paul the Apostle chapel in the 13<sup>th</sup> St. bookstore location on Theophany (January 19<sup>th</sup>) in 1996.

Some early parishioners came to the Eugene mission by way of Portland. These included the author Sarah Cowie, who would write [\*More Spirited Than Lions\*](#) in Eugene. Both she and her daughter would eventually become nuns at the [\*St. Paisius Women's Monastery\*](#). The Jaquettes also moved to Eugene from Portland. In 1998, Joanna Jaquette became the manager of the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore, duties which she took over from Sarah Cowie and that she shared with Elizabeth Sumstine for a time; Mark would become the church's graphic arts designer, webmaster, and bell-ringer. Their family significantly contributed to the community life, including singing in the choir, over the years. The Boyles – who would move to Bend, Oregon before moving to Eugene – also increased their familiarity with the St. Paul the Apostle community at this time, occasionally traveling down to Eugene in order to join the young mission for Divine Services. All three of these families had been part of the Holy Apostles Orthodox Mission in Northwest Portland, to which the Dyers had also once belonged.

The Eugene community grew not only through the addition of new arrivals, but the decision of existing members to remain in Eugene. After an adult life of not having lived in a particular city or state for more than a few years, Stephen Dyer was ready to move on once he and Irene had

been in Eugene for four or five years. In broaching the topic with Irene, she remarked that she thought that if they moved, the mission might not make it. They remained in Eugene and the mission prospered.

On Saturday, February 3, 1996, Reader Stephen Dyer was ordained deacon in Eugene; from this point on, he transitioned from helping with the singing and chanting at the cliros to assisting Fr. David at the Altar Table. Before the Divine Liturgy on the same day, the future Monk Symeon and Mikhail Blinnikov, by then a doctoral student in geography at the University of Oregon and future professor at [St. Cloud State University](#), were ordained readers. It was also at this Divine Liturgy where Deacon Michael Boyle was ordained presbyter (priest). Matushka Magdalena Boyle recalls that the Divine Liturgy was occasioned with a severe ice storm, such that when leaving for the chapel that morning, they had to crawl across the street to get to the car.

One family that joined the mission in the late nineties was an older Greek family that had faced persecution for adhering to the Old Calendar while in Greece, during which the husband and father, Nikitas, was buoyed through the intercession of [St. Charalampus of Magnesia](#). They rejoiced when they found an Orthodox mission in Eugene that used the Old Calendar. Their experience lent a gravitas to the young community and they became godparents to a few of the early converts.

By 1996, the 13th St. bookstore location was becoming inadequate for the growing community. The 1998 Pascha Vigil was attended by sixty-five people. It was time to graduate from rain leaking onto the Altar Table and children using the busy 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. sidewalk as a playground. Fr.

David continuously had his eye out for possible permanent church locations. The site that would eventually become the home for the St. John the Wonderworker community was, seemingly, the least likely property of all.

#### IV. From Icky's to [Ichthys](#)

In the historic Whiteaker neighborhood of Eugene, which was rundown in the 1990s, a trust fund baby with a penchant for Wicca operated a punk rock and hardcore venue called Icky's Teahouse from 1993 until 1997. It was a gathering place for the disenfranchised and the dropouts – truants and tribalists, agitators and eco-anarchists, runaways and rioters, tree sitters and travelers, the streetwise and the street punks, hippies and hard cases. It aspired to be a nexus and meeting place – a place to have a cup of tea, to converse, or to contribute or borrow a book from the community library, but base impulses would drag down most endeavors, mostly due to drug use, mental illness, and opportunism: a free bicycle repair shop in the back became a front for moving stolen bicycles, an intended safe place for runaways ended up facilitating exploitation, an anarchist libertarian spirit resulted in drug overdose deaths on the property. The building was in great disrepair, it was scarred with graffiti and inscribed with sigils; it suffered from neglect and abuse, often in the name of free expression.

Fr. David visited, dressed in the typical [cassock](#) and [skufia](#) of an Orthodox Christian priest. He decided to test the “free expression” principle the place espoused. While drinking a coffee, he spoke to a girl there and asked, “How do you, the 'Icki-ites,' choose your ‘icons’?” She told him that anyone could put up whatever image they want on the walls. So Fr. David put up a 20”x 30” poster icon of [St. George slaying the dragon](#). He returned a few weeks later to find the poster

torn down. He put up another icon of St. George – this time one mounted to a 8”x 10” wood board – and fastened it in place with silicon adhesive. When he came back again, he found it was also ripped off the wall, to such an extent that damage was done to the wall. One teen girl who was working the Icky’s counter at the time remembers this event from 1995. She would later become an Orthodox Christian and live at St. Paisius Monastery for five years before eventually moving to Indianapolis.

Icky’s was no longer fit for uplifting conversation. Anarchists claimed it as their cultural headquarters, offering bomb-making classes there. Local law enforcement monitored the site as the crime incident list in its vicinity grew.

Fr. David prayed. Within six months, the police found drugs there, and closed the place down. The landlord elected to not renew the lease because of the brewing trouble. Fr. David liked the place for its location: it was ideally suited in a neighborhood that needed hope and light, was on a commercial street, but was not as prohibitively expensive as a Downtown location would be. Located in a special historic zone, it was exempt from requirements to provide parking, making it the only viable new church site that had appeared near Downtown for more than a decade. Nevertheless, Fr. David was aware of what a nearly impossible project it would be to transform such an icky mess into a church. While he was hesitating about what to do, his fifteen-year-old daughter Elisha prodded her dad to call and find out if it would be available. The owner, Benjamin Trippett originally wanted to lease the site and offered to rent it for \$1000 a month. Fr. David declined. Instead, Fr. David called back the next day and made another offer: to buy it for \$100,000, with \$20,000 down (to be paid with a loan from CSB), a \$20,000 ‘gift’ from the

owners (tax credit), and the owners financing the remaining \$60,000. Mr. Trippett, realizing that Icky's had created ill will in the neighborhood and wanting to make a positive contribution, accepted this offer. Fr. David met with all of the members of the community and all consented to move forward to make this their permanent church location. On an autumn day in 1997, with \$6000 in the bank, Fr. David, carrying a photo of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) in his breast pocket, met with the owner's accountant and lawyer and secured the \$60,000 loan.

The members of the growing community spent three years stripping the building down to its basic framing and rebuilding it into an Orthodox church. Originally, the community hoped to establish a sanctuary and make only cosmetic changes to other rooms; however, as cleanup progressed – first through the back of the lot, littered as it was with dozens of hypodermic needles and filth, and then through the building one room at a time – it became apparent that new paint and flooring would not suffice. Cleanup alone took several months; demolition to redesign and rebuild began in earnest in the early spring of 1998. The building required complete rewiring, replumbing, and reframing of all interior walls, as well as structural work to meet new code requirements for earthquakes.

City officials, police, and locals were very happy that a church was going to take over a public eyesore wherein crime and both political and social dissent were hatched. But the former owners and those who had found a family at Icky's – if it could be called such – were hostile, not happy. There were threats made, such as: "If you don't cooperate with us, we can't guarantee your safety." One person, unhappy with Icky's becoming a church, threw a brick through the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore window, although his fellow housemates took up a collection to pay

for a new window. Another incident stands out: Two Wiccan former owners of Icky's came to Fr. David and offered to do a service transferring "their holy place to yours" and to bring the press in. Fr. David offered a counter proposal: "We'll have a vespers service, you come and join us, and I'll pray for you and the people who died here." They refused and left. It was their last attempt.

The clean up and renovation was an enormous project. For eighteen months, half of Fr. David's time was exclusively dedicated to the project. In many ways, the act of building the physical church coalesced within the hearts of the faithful the spiritual sense of what it means to be part of the Church, the Body of Christ. The financing for the project came together as one heart at a time was touched to offer assistance. CSB helped out with a grant for \$20,000 for the renovation. The city of Eugene gave the church a 2% loan of \$15,000. The architect Grant Seder only asked for a mere ten percent of his usual fee (which he later waived, saying the church could use the money better than he could); the structural engineer John Norrena donated his services. The demolition and gutting out of the building alone took six months. Removal and disposal of the three-hundred cubic yards of debris from the site was taken care of by the city without charge. The garbage company charged \$50 per load, rather than \$300. When it came time for laying tile, Fr. David opened the phone book and called the first name his eyes landed on; the tiler came, worked every Saturday for months, and donated the tile and his salary, saying, "I need to give something back to God." While working on the church, this man taught many of the children of the community how to help with the tiling. Amazing gifts from God like that happened all the time. In all, professionals and tradesmen donated hundreds of hours of labor and suppliers donated tens of thousands of dollars worth of materials. Several local churches sent over crews on work days.

Worth special thanks are Bari Swartz of Globe Building and Electric, Scharph's Twin Oaks Building Supply, VOS Plumbing, Scott Jackson of Emerald Tile, Garibay Hearing, and Ken Unkeles. Seraphim Cook of Chico, California led both the interior plastering and exterior stuccoing and Nathaniel Eichner, then of Ohio (the family would relocate to Eugene in 2006), made the signs for the church. Peter Lewis spent a month helping the community build and paint a Russian-style iconostasis (wall separating the Altar and nave).

Deacon Stephen Dyer – the general contractor for the project – and Monk Symeon did a lot of the construction and interim work. John Roffe, an Englishman who lived in Eugene from 1997 to 2003, also dedicated himself to building the church, assisting in many ways. The story of retired fisherman Larry Duckworth's assistance is noteworthy. Although married to a parishioner, his presence was sporadic. Yet, he told her that he would help the community finish the church when he saw a person who was living on the street join the community. At the time, a brother named Anthony had run into some difficult times and was homeless. In 1999, he was baptized and received into the Church; working closely with Fr. Michael, he found a job, was trained to be a CNA, and eventually got his own apartment. Larry observed this and, true to his word, began helping out with the construction and wiring of the building.

Some Christian contractors from other parishes came in and did a lot of work on the walls. Members of St. Paul the Apostle Mission were amazing, working all available hours. It seemed like everyone from the community was swinging hammers, installing wire and insulation, laying tile flooring, and applying stucco. Mothers cooked meals. Teens and kids stopped by to work on their way home from school. The total number of parish workers over the three years was thirty,

including the children. Everyone worked heroically to get the church ready for its first service. They were aiming to be ready by Pascha, 1999.

The first service, which took place with bare sheet rock walls, was Holy Friday Vespers on April 8th, 1999, two days early. The community stopped leasing the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore 13<sup>th</sup> St. location in late 1998 and met at the Crow chapel, dedicated to St. Evgenia, until the new location was ready in late 1999. The permanent transition to the new location began with the Nativity service on the eve of January 6, 2000. After more than two years of constant labor and sacrifice, it was a joy to finally have a permanent place of assembly and worship; the official certificate of occupancy arrived in mid-2000, although the church building would remain a work-in-progress for years to come. The new facility also included a storefront "Pilgrim's Way Bookstore and Tearoom," loosely inspired by the idea of a Russian tearoom. From 2000-2001, Daniel Mackay, a parishioner who first stepped off the Greyhound in Eugene on January 10, 1998 as a recently-finished graduate student from New York University, served as manager of Pilgrim's Way Tearoom.

Not all found the move from 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. to Blair Boulevard in Whiteaker desirable. Misha Blinnikov remembers, "I spent a lot of time at the old bookstore and it felt right on the street, while the new location became a lot more like a real parish church and the bookstore became kind of secondary and few people would enter it on a whim (compared to the old location)." Yet, he continues that he never really had time to adjust to the move because "We moved away from Eugene in August of 1999, just as new life came to the new location."

Even as the Blinnikovs were preparing to move, Fr. Michael and Matushka Magdalena Boyle and their family moved to Eugene from Bend, Oregon in order to help with the mission. They arrived in 1998, the same year that the future Fr. Daniel and the Jaquettes arrived. The Boyles stayed until their move to Redding, California in 2002. On a map, Fr. Michael and Matushka Magdalena drew a circle around the church that was no more than three blocks across and told their realtor that they wanted to live within that circle. They ended up purchasing a craftsman-style bungalow two blocks from the church. Due to their proximity to St. John's, Fr. Michael, while working as a speech pathologist during the day, was able to introduce daily matins (beginning at 5:45 am) and daily vespers (beginning at 5 pm) to St. John's schedule of Daily Services, assisted by some young men who lived in the church in brotherhood from 1999 to 2001. He also more frequently served a mid-week Divine Liturgy, which would begin with Proskomedie at 4:30 am. Fr. Michael recognized that the Church's Divine Services are the foundation for life in Christ. The daily matins continued until Fr. Michael's departure in 2002. The daily vespers, facilitated by Fr. David's move from Crow to Eugene in 2003, did not cease.

In addition to introducing more services at the church, Fr. Michael contributed to the confessing life of the church, spending generous time with people as they confessed their sins.

Their son, Joseph Boyle, was ordained St. John's fourth reader in 2000 and he led the right [cliros](#) until the Boyle's departure in 2002. Fr. David's oldest daughter, Elisha, led the left cliros, and eventually the entire choir, from 1999 to 2007. She brought beauty to the singing of the church and led the choir with great skill and taste. Succeeding her was Alexander Polishchuk, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oregon who had previously sung with the Boston Byzantine

Choir.

Building the church was a labor of love, but it was also a cross. It exacted a price and, for those closest to it, the price was steepest. Fr. David would, a few years later, develop Parkinson's disease years before the average age of onset and, most probably, accelerated due to the relentless schedule he kept throughout the 1990s. Deacon Stephen, after two years of incessant work overseeing the building project while simultaneously working full time to support his family, was deeply exhausted, rendered numb by fatigue. It would take him years to recover from the sacrifice required for laboring to build the Lord's House.

#### V. "Only Unity Saves"

Fr. David and Deacon Stephen were members of Christ the Saviour Brotherhood (CSB), which was uncanonical throughout the 1990s. During Holy Week, 2000, the future Archimandrite Gerasim (Eliel) travelled to Fr. Herman, who was visiting St. Michael's Skete on Spruce Island in Alaska, to tell him that not only his monks and nuns but a large group of priests (including Fr. David) who had been his spiritual children were formally requesting that he step down as abbot, stop serving the Divine services, cease offering spiritual counsel, and return to California to take up residence outside the St. Xenia Skete at Wildwood, California in order lead a life of repentance and reclusion. Fr. Herman complied. This was a difficult time for all, but it was a necessary step in order to depart the uncanonical jurisdiction into which they had been led by Fr. Herman and enter, instead, into communion with the Church. All began to pray for direction. In Eugene, the faithful would pray an Akathist to St. John the Wonderworker every Sunday (this before the church was dedicated to him). By November, the St. Herman Monastery was received

into the Serbian Orthodox Church by Bishop Jovan; also at this time, Fr. Gerasim was elevated to the rank of abbot.

Fr. David had been in dialogue with [His Grace Bishop Longin](#) of the Serbian Diocese of the Midwest, who recommended that he speak with [His Grace Bishop Jovan](#) of the Diocese of Western America. When the monasteries of St. Herman of Alaska and St. Paisius joined the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Eugene mission followed. The mission always had a close connection to both monasteries, with seven young women from Eugene attending the Lyceum school hosted by St. Paisius Monastery in the 1990s and eight men attending month-long Missionary School summer courses also at St. Paisius. Fr. David petitioned Bishop Jovan to enter the Serbian Church after Bishop Jovan received Abbess Michaela and the nuns of St. Paisius Monastery in November of 2000. Bishop Jovan ordained Fr. David Lubliner, Fr. Michael Boyle, and Deacon Stephen at [St. Steven's Serbian Orthodox Cathedral](#) in Alhambra in mid-December (December 15-18<sup>th</sup>) and then traveled up to Eugene on December 23, 2000 in order to receive the other parishioners into the Orthodox Church. While in Eugene, with (then Deacon now Protopresbyter) Djurica Gordic serving as translator for the bishop, Fr. Djurica remarked to Dn. Stephen, "Your Faith is correct, your canonicity has not been," testifying to how much of the True Faith had been transmitted to the little mission up until that point. Bishop Jovan was a God-sent spiritual director for the parish. Having lived at the twelfth-century monastery of [Studenica](#) in central Serbia from the age of twelve, he was well-formed in the spiritual life and had immersed himself in Scripture. During his pastoral visits to Eugene, he would answer questions (through a translator because he did not speak English) with rich references to Scripture, especially the writings of the Apostle Paul.

At the time of his initial visit, Bishop Jovan suggested that the church be dedicated to St. John the Wonderworker; Fr. David had originally planned to dedicate the church to the Syrian [St. Eugene](#). Given that the faithful were already asking for St. John's prayers when there was no Divine Liturgy being served in the church, all recognized the dedication of the church to St. John as Divinely inspired.

Fr. David cannot overstate the importance of reception into the Holy Orthodox Church both for himself personally and also for the entire Eugene community:

Being received in the Orthodox Church by Bishop Jovan is far and away the most significant element of my life in Eugene; for St John the Wonderworker Church, it was truly our defining moment. The pastoral agony of trying to carry an uncanonical parish defies description. Patriarch Irinei (at that time, Bishop Irinei) was also present during my initial discussion concerning our being received into the canonical church. At one point, he put his hand on my shoulder, looked me straight in the eye and said, in Serbian, "Don't worry. You will soon be in the Church. It will be much better." From the time of that initial discussion, we sensed that we were protected under Bishop Jovan's omophorian and when we entered the Church, I was deeply affected by his pastoral love and felt that a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Finally, we were home.

Also in 2000, in partnership with the [St. Paisius Missionary School](#), St. John's inaugurated the [St. John the Wonderworker Family Camp](#), a Monday-Friday summer camp aimed for family members of all ages, with guest speakers for adults, a large range of activities for the children,

and daily prayer, meals, and recreation in a beautiful natural setting. The first guest speaker was the Romanian survivor of Communist prison camps, V. Rev. George Calciu (+2006) of blessed memory. His arrival to Eugene for the Camp coincided with the interim period between Fr. Herman's retirement and entrance into the Serbian Orthodox Church; therefore, Fr. George was able to offer Fr. David and Presvytera Esther important spiritual counsel and advice at this time. During a 2006 visit to Romania, Presvytera Esther was able to again visit with Fr. George and receive his blessing a few weeks before his repose. The Family Camp's other guests over the years have been Archbishop Michael (Dahulich) of New York-New Jersey (2016), Abbot Damascene of St. Herman of Alaska Monastery (2006), Abbot Tryphon of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery in Vashon Island, Washington (2015), Hieromonk James Corazza (2013), V. Rev. Josiah Trenham (2009), V. Rev. Serafim Gascoigne (2007, 2013, & 2015), V. Rev. Ilija Balach (2008), V. Rev. Michael Oyer (2000-2014), V. Rev. Philip Tolbert (2000-2014), Professor Christopher Veniamin (2014), and author Klaus Kenneth (2014). The camp continues to this day.

In accordance with the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America's Uniform Parish Regulations, the community of St. John the Wonderworker elected a Church School Board in 2000: Fr. David presided with Christopher Sumstine, Sarah Cowie, Mark Jaquette, and Nikitas Dimopoulos. The first person to take over Board President duties from Fr. David was Christopher Sumstine (2005-2006 and 2008-2011), later Board Presidents would include Iley McCready (2007) and Maria Nemirovskaya (2011-present). The Church School Board eventually expanded to include eight members.

In 2001, the future Rev. Stephen Vernak (rector of [Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church](#) in

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) moved to Eugene from New Jersey. Fr. Stephen is the son of V. Rev. David Vernak and grandson of V. Rev. John Nehrebecki, who even served as a subdeacon for St. John the Wonderworker when he visited the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Brooklyn in 1947 or 1948. While in Eugene, Fr. Stephen was the manager of the [Ya-Po-Ah Terrace Retirement Apartments](#); it was within the community of St. John the Wonderworker that he met his future wife, Anna. The couple moved to Pennsylvania in 2004 so that he could attend [St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary](#), from where he graduated in 2007 after having been ordained a presbyter (priest) in April. "My short time at St. John's," Fr. Stephen describes as, "incredibly impactful...I made friendships that last to this day. The full liturgical schedule and active group of young adults that shared in worship and fellowship helped shape my vocation. Glory to God for His Providence in allowing me to be a member of such a wonderful community!"

On June 29, 2002, on which day was celebrated the Feast of St. John the Wonderworker and St. Tikhon the Wonderworker of Amathunts, His Grace Bishop Jovan consecrated the Altar and church of St. John in Eugene. Leading the faithful in the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy with a number of visiting hieromonks and priests, Bishop Jovan sealed the relics of the [Great-martyr Lazar](#) into the Altar Table and anointed the four walls of the church with [Holy Chrism](#). Many of the Faithful visited from Portland, Corvallis, and Ashland, clergy and monastics visited from California and Arizona, and the Liturgy was followed by a banquet under a tent outside, during which the children performed a play of the life of [St. Sava](#) and the bishop presented Fr. David, Fr. Michael, Dn. Stephen, and the Board of the Mission Parish with episcopal grammata (awards from the bishop recognizing service), noting the "love shown towards the Orthodox Faith [ . . . ]

and particularly for the effort and unselfish work in spreading the Holy Orthodox Faith” (Ep. No. 538).

Not long thereafter, after seven years of service as the bishop of the Diocese of Western America, Bishop Jovan was appointed the bishop of Šumadija in Serbia. [Bishop Longin](#) administered the diocese from 2002 to 2006 after Bishop Jovan’s departure, visiting the community in 2004. [Bishop Maxim](#) was then installed as bishop of the Diocese of Western America on July 30, 2006. He brought to the Diocese his unique gifts and background: being both a monk from [Tvrđos Monastery](#) and the son of a priest and a pious family (his sister is a nun), guidance from his spiritual father [Bishop Atanasije \(Jevtic\)](#) (one of the four so-called “Justinites”: spiritual sons of [St. Justin Popović](#) who became bishops), an education both broad and deep, knowledge of five languages, musical and artistic talents, and both a deep commitment to Christ and stamina that, when combined with youth and good health, have enabled him to regularly visit all of the parishes and monasteries in the geographically-vast Western Diocese, which encompasses the West Coast, the Southwest, the Northwest (including Alaska), Montana, Colorado, Mexico, and Hawaii.

## **VI. A Future Rectory and A Future Procured**

With the blessing of Bishop Jovan, Fr. George Calciu, and Fr. David, whose idea it was, Daniel Mackay returned to graduate school in 2001, this time at the University of Oregon, in order to earn his PhD in English literature so that he would be able to support a family as a working missionary priest should he be ordained in the future. He would successfully defend his dissertation on May 12, 2008.

For a long time, Fr. David thought that the house next door to the church and the attached apartments could help facilitate a community wherein parishioners live a short walk from church such as they did in Crow. Fr. Daniel remembers not long after his arrival to Eugene in January of 1998, Fr. David walking him around the block and pointing out the apartments and house next door, suggesting that one could be a residence for single women and the other for single men. In fact, in 1997, there was even an effort to have a young women's house on Lawrence Street between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Ave. under the guidance of a parishioner, Georgina. One woman, Xenia, lived at the house, but not for more than four months. Although, the effort did not last long, it was a sincere effort to encourage community for single adults as well as families.

There were also efforts to create housing for single young men. In 1999, John Roffe and Daniel Mackay responded to an invitation from Fr. David to live in the church. Fr. David thought that it would be wise to have men living on the property to keep an eye on things, to live in close proximity to the church and prayer life of the church, and to support one another in the spiritual life. When John Roffe went to St. Herman of Alaska Monastery for a time, Joseph, Leonty, and Jeremiah (the latter two former novices of St. Herman's Monastery) rotated through the room. The group was entrusted to Fr. Michael for spiritual care; they would pray together with Fr. Michael twice daily during matins and vespers. It was difficult to generate commitment, however, to a common life of prayer and the services usually only included Fr. Michael and Daniel with occasional participation from others in the church community.

From 2006 through 2010, the Apostle Peter & Paul Fellowship – a men's prayer group started by

Daniel Mackay and Theophan Halvorson in May of 2006 with the blessing of Fr. David – would gather on Saturday morning, praying Midnight Office and then eating breakfast together. This group never really concluded, but instead developed into the Apostle Peter & Paul House when the church purchased 1229 West Third Alley in 2011. From 2011 to 2014, men would rent one of four rooms in the house as they lived on the church property. The idea of a morning prayer group was subsumed into daily matins when it was reintroduced to St. John's in 2011. Now, instead of gathering once a week for morning prayer, parishioners – men and women both – can gather every weekday for morning or evening prayer.

Throughout all of these efforts, it was evident that both Fr. David and Fr. Michael – and later Fr. Daniel – had a common vision intending to foster fellowship with the church at the center of community life, both spiritually and physically.

Fr. David, however, did not give up on the idea of expanding the church to include the house and apartments next door; nevertheless, by 2002, he felt that there was no way that he or the church could financially handle the purchase of 312 Blair Blvd. and its apartments. Then, during a Saturday evening Vigil in 2002, he started thinking about the house next door. He got the distinct impression that St. John was telling him to get the house. Presvytera Esther, who had been very much opposed to the idea of getting the house, had a similar experience at that same service. He began to pursue the issue. He went to the city historic planners again. They said he was nuts. Where would he get the money? Pursuing it further, he was able to get a loan of \$150,000 at 2% interest. A city program also allowed them to get a second mortgage on their house. They got the house next door, signing for it on the Feast of [St. Ephraim of Nea Makri](#). The church has yet to

be able to acquire it, but Fr. Daniel was able to purchase it from Fr. David in 2011, so it has functionally served as a rectory, or parish house, since its extensive renovation concluded in 2003.

Other land purchases of lots adjacent to the original church lot were made in 2001, 2005, 2011, and 2015. Each property contained rentals, the income from which helped pay down the notes on the properties. In one instance, Fr. David's father, Carl, lent the money that was used to make the 2001 purchase of the field behind the church, which quickly became the church's backyard. Carl, who had once considered formerly declaring his son dead to the family after Fr. David's conversion to Christianity from Judaism, warmed up to the church after years of seeing the fruits of the mission's labors. Other purchases were financed through the selfless giving and lending of parishioners who believed in the future of a Holy House dedicated to God in the Whiteaker neighborhood. With every purchase, more community experience was facilitated because it enabled more parishioners to live near the church.

This community is not, however, insular. It is connected to the Church, which is spread across the world. In 2007, Fr. David and Dn. Stephen led a pilgrimage of ten men to Meteora and Mt. Athos in Greece. In Meteora, they were joined by the future Fr. Daniel and his new bride Maria, who were concluding their honeymoon. The men proceeded to Mt. Athos, where they prayed together, visited centuries-old monasteries and millennia-old places of asceticism, and further developed their bonds of fraternal love.

## **VII. A Bouquet of Persons**

In addition to the missionary outreach of the Pilgrim's Way Bookstore, the many classes and talks the Bookstore has hosted, and the retreat of the Family Camp, in 2004 St. John's began its monthly First Saturday Neighborhood Breakfast ministry, in which members prepare and share breakfast with their neighbors in a community environment, serving meals to the homeless of Eugene (especially those in the Whiteaker neighborhood). The Breakfast offers a respectful place where souls isolated by society and beaten by the elements can experience warmth, hospitality, and good food. Guests are treated with dignity and provided a sit-down dining experience at a table decorated with flowers, fruit, and pastries, where they are then served warm plates of food and can ask for as many more plates of food as they would like. The church averages serving between 155-200 plates of food. Notably, the First Saturday Neighborhood Breakfast offered the church the opportunity to coordinate with volunteers from St. George Greek Orthodox Church, as well as a local Protestant fellowship, and a local county agency that gives bread to the homeless.

The church continued to grow, one person at a time. A lawyer from Redding, California with a passion for chess and tennis relocated to Eugene after learning about the community during a stay at St. Herman of Alaska Monastery. A couple from upstate New York relocated to Eugene and were moved when witnessing the small community struggling to live out the Gospel. One man became Orthodox Christian at St. John's after hearing Georgian folk music at Lane Community College. So intrigued he was by the soul of a people that could make such music, that after he read about how important Christ and His Orthodox Church was to the Georgian people, he visited St. John's, began attending, was eventually baptized, and even became fluent in Georgian and eventually moved there to study theology. One parishioner resolved to join the

church after she and her family visited and saw that a leak in the central dome of the nave was handled with a bucket that was left out to catch the water: “I want to go here,” she told her husband with a smile, “they need us.” One woman discovered a sympathy with the church because it resonated with the Orthodox emphasis on the Apostolic teachings that she learned from a small Christian congregation that she had attended in Springfield. One couple visited and joined St. John the Wonderworker after years of practicing Buddhism and attending a talk by the Dalai Lama in India, wherein he recommended to Westerners to explore their Christian roots. One elderly Russian woman came to the church of St. John the Wonderworker after having personally known St. John the Wonderworker for sixteen years. Her family fled the Soviet Union in 1933 and she eventually lived in Shanghai, Australia, Europe, and San Francisco before moving to Eugene.

One young man first learned about the Church while studying at Gutenberg College, a local four-year Great Books college. His journey into the Church began when he first visited Pilgrim’s Way Bookstore in 2005. He would eventually marry a parishioner (another former Gutenberg student) and be ordained an Orthodox priest after time in Greece and seminary. The conversion of this man, Rev. Daniel Kirk (priest of [St. Herman Orthodox Church](#) in Kalispell, Montana), led the way for other Gutenberg students to learn about the Church, including one young woman whose parents joined the church after their daughter’s baptism. Another young man, a musician and writer who hitchhiked across the country, was baptized and took an early lead in gardening St. Spyridon’s Community Garden. He would marry another graduate of Gutenberg who had become Orthodox at St. George Greek Orthodox Church. Another young man from Washington who would sometimes visit monasteries would join the community and eventually live in a house

on church property and invaluable serve the community and the homeless of the neighborhood. One woman with a love for animals moved on the property and began teaching community art classes out of her home. One homeless man who lived at the Eugene Mission discovered the church through the First Saturday Neighborhood Breakfast; he began by being fed and was soon helping to feed others. Eventually, he was baptized with St. Herman of Alaska as his patron; after the baptism and Divine Liturgy, Fr. David announced, “we finally have a Herman,” because there had never been a Eugene parishioner with the beloved St. Herman of Alaska as a patron. One family moved to the area after attending the St. John the Wonderworker Family Camp. A young woman was baptized on Dormition in 2013 after being introduced to the Beatitudes in Fr. Daniel’s composition course at the University of Oregon ten years before; she could not shake how Christ’s wisdom stood out from the other religious and philosophical readings of that class and finally entered into the Church of the Beatitudes through the hand of her former instructor. One man decided to become Orthodox Christian after decades of studying Scripture and concluding that an honest appraisal of *sola scriptura* was leading him to the Church. One woman was baptized at the age of eighty on [Lazarus Saturday](#) in 2011 after becoming increasingly involved with the church over twelve years. Another man was baptized seventeen years after first having a conversation with Fr. Symeon at a Pilgrim’s Way Bookstore Friday night Coffee House and learning that in the writings of the [Desert Fathers](#) are the means to follow Christ’s direction to “go and sin no more” ([John 5:14](#) & [John 8:11](#)). One woman was baptized in 2014 after a being a catechumen for a couple years. When he first met her, Fr. David thought that her name was familiar. He looked her up and found her name on a prayer list from the early 1990s. It turns out that she had been one of the first to stop by the Washington St. bookstore and had been prayed for by name for twenty years before she finally became part of the community. Nurses came.

Carpenters came. Academics and artisans, journeyman and jewelers, broadcast engineers, booksellers, mechanics, masons, mothers, professors, pilgrims, children, and the childless: One-by-one, soul-by-soul, people were drawn to the church, even as the itinerant and transient quality of many people's situations in Eugene led parishioners to different cities and different lands.

About this marvelous bouquet of persons offering its aroma up to God in this little chapel on Blair Boulevard, Fr. Daniel observes:

The love of God is palpable wherever the Mysteries (Sacraments) are, but it is especially evident in a community such as St. John's where so many people have made sacrifices to remain here, often *because* of the church. In an age when people move for employment, family, or climate, a number of parishioners over the years have prioritized their spiritual community, choosing instead to bear the Cross of inferior job opportunities, long-distance commutes to family, or an uncomfortable climate in order to have a spiritual home that provides a spiritual vocation, a spiritual family, and continuous prayers for 'favorable weather.' I remember one time years ago, when I was feeling sorry for myself, I remarked to Fr. David that I had given up a lot to stay in Eugene and remain a part of St. John's. Fr. David, who has given up more than most for Christ – certainly more than me – just smiled and said, 'many here have.' Until this point, I had not looked around and noticed how right he was. Many people who could have moved over the years chose not to because they found a home at St. John's. This sacrifice – and when one considers the gift of having a spiritual home in a country known for its restlessness, it really is only a small sacrifice – connects us to those early Orthodox Christians about whom we read in Acts of the Apostles: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and

breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

The St. John community developed good relations with its next-door neighbors: the members of JESCO Club, an AA group meeting space next to the new rectory. Step 5 in the Twelve Step program is the obligation to confess one’s misdeeds: “to admit to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” Many in that AA group would come to confess to Fr. David. They kept an eye on things going on around the church property. There was a clean and sober motorcycle group that met at JESCO that also helped keep an eye on things for the church.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Whiteaker neighborhood suffered from the classic urban ills that befall rundown parts of town: addiction, mental illness, and sin populating the streets. During a number of months when the church building was first being renovated, Fr. David had a catechumen, Gerasim, living in an RV trailer in the front parking lot in order to keep an eye on things. He sometimes heard gunshots in the middle of the night. Yet, God protected the site of His future church. Even when incidents happened and created temptation, the patient endurance of sorrows and trust in God led people beyond the challenges of the moment. Once early in the predawn dark at about six o’clock, when matins had only just begun and Fr. Michael and Daniel Mackay were half-way through the Six Psalms, a piece of metal shattered the Altar’s center leaded-glass window, which had featured a cross design. Daniel chased after and apprehended the disturbed young man who had thrown the metal. John Rose, the local artisan who assembled

the leaded glass, quickly made a replacement. Although spooked, the two pressed on with morning prayers in the following weeks and months and God revealed that He takes care of His church.

Through prayer — accompanied by the physical effort of reclaiming neglected and abused property and serving others — St. John the Wonderworker has been instrumental in the revitalization of the Whiteaker neighborhood. One fellow traveler, Bill Arcright, was having a hard time when he first stopped by the First Saturday Breakfast in 2004. The love he experienced there, he says, really helped him...now he calls it his “gratitude breakfast.” He attributes the revitalization of the area to the work of the St. John the Wonderworker Church...this is a perspective often neglected when the focus is on [the commercial success of the neighborhood](#). But the turnaround of Whiteaker began with volunteer parishioners and other community members praying, pounding nails, and planting flowers starting in 1997 when the area was at its nadir.

In addition to one-shot missionary activities in the past, like having a table at the University of Oregon campus, Fr. David’s outreach at local youth festivals, and having a Pilgrim’s Way Bookstore Table at the Lane County Fair, the community has a more sustained presence at the Whiteaker Block Party, which was launched by locals on the first Saturday of August in 2008. Each subsequent year, it has expanded to where it is now a large festival that includes four blocks closed to traffic, six major music stages and a number of smaller ones, art workshops for children, arts and crafts booths, and a number of food booths and approximately 8000-10,000 attendees. Beginning in 2012, St. John’s has offered free valet bicycle parking accompanied with

manned security until midnight, bell-ringing demonstrations, church tours, a Pilgrim's Way Bookstore table, and "The Onion Dome" food booth.

In 2007, the church also finally built its long-awaited St. Katherine Bell Tower, complete with a set of Russian Bells from Moscow. The Tower is dedicated to the memory of a beloved six-year-old girl who died of a brain tumor in 2006, Katherine "Katya" Polishchuk. During the course of her illness and death (November 1<sup>st</sup>), the home health nurse who was attending her was so moved by the presence of grace around Katya that she herself began attending St. John's and, a year later, was baptized, receiving Katya's patron saint, the [Great-martyr Katherine](#), as her own heavenly intercessor. Katya's November 4<sup>th</sup> funeral coincided with Bishop Maxim's first-ever visit to Eugene, so he served the funeral. It was a day that was marked with great sadness but also joy, foremost in the hope all Christians have for Eternal life, but also joy in meeting the community's new archpastor for the first time.

Over the next year, donations were made in Katya's memory to the Bell Tower building fund, which was dedicated on the Sunday of St. John of the Ladder, April 6, 2008 by Bishop Maxim. The Bell Tower was built by Nathaniel Eichner, who moved with his family from Columbus, Ohio to Eugene – arriving on July 2, 2006, the Feast day of St. John the Wonderworker – in order to be part of a traditional, missionary-oriented Orthodox Christian community. Nathaniel also constructed Katya's coffin; six years after her repose when Nathaniel himself died from a brain tumor, her parents had his coffin, which he had begun but was unable to finish, completed. Katya's father, Alexander, would be ordained St. John's fifth reader in 2012 by Bishop Maxim. Her mother, Maria, would serve ably as Parish Treasurer and, eventually, Board President.

In 2008, St. John's installed a hoop house and tilled a half-acre of property in order to create "St. Spyridon's Community Garden." Managed and cared for by parishioners and other church friends, the garden, which now features an irrigation system, produces vegetables that can then be used in our Sunday trapeza meals, used by parishioners, or given to the homeless.

Outward expansion, however, would mean nothing without inner expansion and development. Peter Mead recalls that the Righteous Job the Much-Suffering was told, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). He observes:

Suffering grows us into the largeness of our souls, as it did for our priest, Fr. David. In addition to the natural challenges facing husbands and fathers, he led us in our spiritual migration into the fullness of Orthodox Christianity. And for many years he has walked through the fire of Parkinson's Disease, watching his capacities diminish as the needs around him grew, forcing him to cast every hope and every step onto Christ.

"Fr. David's journey was one from missionary to spiritual father," notes Protodeacon Stephen. Beginning the Eugene mission with fervor to spread the Gospel in the Orthodox context, the missionaries themselves were changed; the true mission field turned out to be the human heart. Fr. David's final years in Eugene were spent praying and patiently listening to people's confessions, offering a word of advice at times, but other times remaining silent, trusting that God speaks to the repentant heart. Peter Mead continues, "For some of us, easily distracted by the worries and cares of this world, this way of salvation looks like a generational process. We pray for our parents, we pray for our

children, and we hope that our faith may be perfected in our children. We are so grateful to have found the Church where we can work out our salvation with fear and trembling.”

Sensing that the Parkinson's was inhibiting his service to the community, Fr. David asked the bishop to be relieved of his duties and announced his intent to retire once a new priest could be found. The Parkinson's had affected him to such a degree that he was unable to make the announcement himself and asked Abbot Gerasim of St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, who had traveled up to Eugene to serve the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of Theophany in 2008, to read a letter announcing the plan. Fr. Gerasim read Fr. David's letter from the Ambo after the Liturgy while Fr. David sat nearby in the Altar. Some wept audibly as Fr. Gerasim read such a sad announcement to the community. Whereas the bishop had originally agreed and work began on finding a priest to succeed Fr. David, after seeing Fr. David get stronger after some new treatments, the bishop rescinded his acceptance of Fr. David's retirement. Fr. David, with Deacon Stephen's help, hung on for the sake of the community until Fr. Daniel returned from seminary.

### **VIII. From Mission to Parish**

The mission had no paid clergy or staff from 1991 to 2000. Following guidelines for a Serbian Orthodox mission, a Church School Board was elected in 2000 to take responsibility for overseeing the legal, financial, and maintenance needs of the community. At the same time, Fr. David began receiving a small stipend for his labors as priest and pastor, whatever the community could muster. By 2009, the community had continued to grow and was able to support its priest. Its Church Board responsibly fulfilled its duties. In response, the Serbian

Diocese of Western America granted St. John the Wonderworker full parish status.

Later in 2009, Daniel Mackay, by then a University of Oregon postdoctoral instructor, was ordained by His Grace Bishop Maxim to the diaconate on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 27<sup>th</sup>; during the Great Entrance of the same Liturgy, Fr. David was elevated to the rank of protopresbyter. Fr. Daniel and his family moved to Pennsylvania from 2010-2012 where he attended St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 2011, while home in Eugene during summer break from seminary, he was ordained presbyter at St. John the Wonderworker. Aware that Fr. David's worsening Parkinson's might not permit a full three years for Fr. Daniel at the seminary, Bishop Maxim and the dean of the seminary, Archpriest Alexander Atty (+2014) of blessed memory, supported Fr. Daniel in his efforts to take extra classes in both the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years. His completion of these extra classes permitted him to return to Oregon for his last year of study where, in November of 2012, Bishop Maxim designated him rector of St. John the Wonderworker as Fr. David stepped back to become *pastor emeritus*. Fr. Daniel completed his final four courses via correspondence, graduating from St. Tikhon's in 2013 with a Master of Divinity.

In 2012, Reader Aidan Mcquillen began attending St. John the Wonderworker after moving from Gold Hill to Florence, Oregon, becoming St. John's sixth reader.

In November of 2014, after twenty-three years of serving the Eugene community, Fr. David and Presvytera Esther sold their property in Crow and moved to St. Paisius Serbian Orthodox Monastery in Safford, Arizona, where they had a house built on the property. The St. John

community hosted a farewell brunch for the departing Lubliners on October 25, 2014, beginning with a molieben of thanksgiving for their twenty-three years of service and then sharing remembrances and gifts honoring that service during the meal.

In 2015 and 2016, the community continued its renovation of the building by prioritizing its purpose as a place of prayer and worship. The nave was expanded with a vaulted ceiling, routes to and from the nave were adjusted to reduce distraction during the services, wiring and lighting were improved, and a plan for filling the church with murals of iconography by artist and parishioner Daniel Balter was implemented. Almost all of the work was done with long hours of volunteer labor, accomplished for the love of God.

In the midst of this construction, during a pastoral visit to Eugene on October 31, 2015, Bishop Maxim elevated Deacon Stephen to the rank of protodeacon, recognizing his faithful service to Christ in Eugene for twenty-four years, nineteen-and-a-half of which have been as deacon. That Protodeacon Stephen would receive such an honor in the middle of the church when it was still a worksite was fitting given that he served as the general contractor on both the 1997-2000 renovation and 2015-2016 remodel.

Dedicated to building a community around the Church, St. John the Wonderworker offers daily matins and vespers Monday-Friday, a midweek Divine Liturgy, All-night Vigil on Saturday evenings, and Divine Liturgy on Sundays. St. John the Wonderworker is a small, one hundred-member church with a dozen or so of its parishioners living a short walk from the church door. It has hosted homeless families on the property and regards itself as a “village church” in the

middle of the city of Eugene. At the same time, it works with the other three Orthodox churches in the Southern Willamette Valley (each of different jurisdictions), praying with one another in pan-Orthodox services and supporting one another's endeavors and ministry. Lastly, it reaches out to the greater worldwide Church. The small community has been the home parish, even if for a short time before their ordination, of a deacon and three priests (not including Fr. David and Fr. Michael); additionally, it has produced four monastics who live at two different monasteries. Six parishioners or former parishioners have gone to seminary, including one who earned an advanced degree in theology from the Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary in the country of Georgia. St. John's has hosted international speakers and scholars, including [V. Rev. George Calciu](#) in 2000, [V. Rev. Dr. Josiah Trenham](#) in 2009, [Christos Yannaras](#) in 2012, [Vincent Rossi](#) in 2013, and [Dr. Christopher Veniamin](#) and [Klaus Kenneth](#) in 2014. Parishioners often go on pilgrimage to holy places throughout the world, venerating saints and places where our Lord walked, asking for prayers at famous churches and in remote monasteries, and, above all, [praying for the grace of God](#) that [bestows peace](#) so that they may bring back to a city primarily known for its rebelliousness a taste of the Living Water of Jesus Christ ([John 7:37-38](#)).

*“Glory to God for all things!”*

*Fr. Daniel Mackay*  
St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople  
Thanksgiving Day  
13/26 November 2015