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Editorial

Bishop Basil & Fr Alexander

This issue of the Vine takes a slightly different format as Community news has been postponed due to Fr. Alexander's absence over the summer because of illness.

Bishop Basil of Amphipolis retired from leading the Vicariate in October.

We give great thanks for the gift of Bishop Basil's spiritual direction and wish him all blessings for his retirement. We also send love to Fr. Alexander and Matushka Julie and look forward to Fr. Alexander's return in December, God Willing.

Archbishop Gabriel of Comana sent this message:

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have accepted the request from Bishop Basil to retire, and his retirement will become effective from 12 October 2009. After this date Bishop Basil will not be undertaking any pastoral, liturgical or administrative duties.

Bishop Basil has been my suffragan bishop with special responsibility for the parishes in Great Britain and Ireland since his acceptance under the omophorion of the Patriarch of Constantinople in June 2006. I wish it to be known that I am profoundly grateful to Bishop Basil for his pastoral and administrative care of these parishes and communities, and I ask God's blessing for him and wish him well in his retirement.

We shall have an opportunity to discuss in full the implications of Bishop Basil's retirement for the parishes and communities of the exarchate in Great Britain and Ireland at the next clergy meeting to be held on 23-24 October. I shall be chairing this meeting and I expect all the clergy of the exarchate in Great Britain and Ireland to attend.

I have asked Archpriest John Marks to continue in his position as dean of clergy, and in this capacity he is to be the first point of contact for any queries you may have

There will be a further opportunity for me to meet with both clergy and laity at the next meeting of the assembly, scheduled for the 28 November. I therefore urge all members of the assembly to come to this meeting. Elections should proceed as normal. God bless you all!

Fr. Alexander and Matushka Julie sent us this message:

Fr Alexander would like to thank the members of the standing committee and everyone else who responded to news of his illness with offers to take on jobs and give time to keeping the worship and work of the community going. This has been a wonderful help. In the strange way these things happen, it is also perhaps turning out to be a sign pointing to what is needed anyway over the next year or two.

Matushka would also like to say that she was very comforted by the tremendous support and help she received with the difficulties she had to face.

We are both very grateful to all of you.

New Assistant Editor

We welcome Mark McBeth into the Orthodox Church and our Community of St. Nicholas. Many Years! We also welcome him as Assistant Editor of the Vine. If you have any ideas or would like to contribute information, articles or photographs, please contact Mark : info@orthodoxchurchdunblane.org.uk.

Authorship

People have asked who wrote the unnamed articles in previous issues. In future we will always cite authors names except for Editorial, which might be written by Fr. Alexander, Mother Mary or Mark. Desert Wisdom is always written by Mother Mary. Fr. Alexander wrote the article on Staretz Amvrosy in issue one. Mother Mary wrote the article on New Martyr Elizabeth in issue two.

Author's views do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial panel.

Our theme in this issue is pilgrimage....

Christian pilgrimage to venerate holy sites connected with the life of Christ is first recorded in the 4th Century when pilgrimage was encouraged by Saint Jerome and established by Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, who traveled to Jerusalem and Cyprus. In 381 A.D. a nun called Egeria set out from her monastery in France or Spain to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Her letters back to her fellow sisters describe the Christian environment; the monastics she met, the holy places she visited and the church liturgies in which she worshipped. This remains the essence of pilgrimage today.

In Russia pilgrimage to the Holy Land dates from the 11th Century. Pilgrims were called *palomniki* as they brought back palm branches as souvenirs. Although Russian pilgrimage was interrupted in the Soviet era, it began to revive in the 1990's, both to national shrines and the Holy Land and Mount Athos in Greece.

There are now many travel companies organising pilgrimages in comfortable style compared to the past. However an older tradition continues in Lough Derg, County Donegal, Ireland. Here there is an annual, three-day, ecumenical pilgrimage to Station Island which has been renowned since the time of St. Patrick. Pilgrims walk in bare feet, stay awake for 24 hours, have one daily meal of dry toast, oatcakes, black tea or coffee and participate in church services and nine 'Stations' (a Celtic form of contemplative

prayer). One of the 'penitential beds' of stone that originally formed part of the Celtic monks cells is dedicated to St. Molaise, a 6th century local saint and possibly the same saint of Scotland's Holy Isle.

What importance does pilgrimage have for us today?

The tradition of setting out from home and leaving behind all that is familiar, to make a journey which is focused on Christian heritage, community and prayer, demands spiritual effort. It is a time of renunciation, reflection, inspiration, and spiritual refreshment that continues to nourish after returning home. It can also be a time of education about the richness of our tradition through observation, speaking with others and receiving spiritual direction from elders and monastics. It offers opportunity for giving in thanksgiving and worship of Christ, prayers to the saints and support to those caring for shrines and monasteries. It may also offer an opportunity for Christian witness in encounters with others along the pilgrim route.

In this issue of *The Vine* we explore pilgrimage to sites in Scotland and England, but also look at the path that we can all tread without leaving our house, or even our room.

It is not necessary to travel many miles to walk the pilgrim path of prayer.