

09/10/2019

## Church to celebrate 90th anniversary in Stratford, Conn



Three bishops, two famous icons and more than 100 parishioners are expected at St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church's 90th anniversary celebration this month.

The church on Honeyspot Road across the street from Two Roads Brewing Company was built in 1941, but services actually began in a home on nearby Lake Street in 1929.

Among the congregation's first members were aviation great Igor Sikorsky and several employees of the company he founded after immigrating to the United States.

Other founders included Sikorsky test pilot Boris Sergievsky and Nikolai Alexandrov, an engineering professor.

To mark the milestone, the church will be installing new icons depicting Christ flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist in half moon-shaped lunettes below

its dome.

“It’s a traditional scheme that’s seen in many older Orthodox churches,” said Protodeacon Paul Drozdowski, an iconographer who was working on putting the finishing touches on the icons Tuesday.

“Just to do these it took the greater part of the summer,” he said.

“It’s all based on time-honored traditional subjects that you see in churches in Russia, Greece, Serbia, places like that,” Drozdowski said. “That’s a big feature of icon-painting. You don’t have free rein completely to come up with something totally original. It has to be based on tradition.

“Within that framework, there is some freedom for a little bit of artistic expression, but the majority of it is dictated by tradition,” he said.

One difference in the work being done this month from tradition is that Drozdowski used acrylic paint on canvas to be pasted onto the church’s walls, as opposed to traditional frescoes painted directly onto damp plaster.

That allows him to work on paintings in his own studio, instead of painting Michaelangelo-style on a scaffold.

“There are people who still do that, but it’s extremely difficult,” he said.

The church is also welcoming two holy icons — the Kursk-Root Icon and the “Hawaiian” Myrrh-streaming Icon — at services the weekend of Oct. 19 and 20.

“They’re two quite famous icons of the Mother of God which are considered miraculous icons,” Archpriest Dimitri Jakimowicz said.

The icons are not worshiped themselves, Jakimowicz said — “only God is worshiped.”

“But we venerate the saints,” he said. “We respect them and venerate them. So we pray to the saints so they pray for us.”

In addition to the icons, three Russian Orthodox bishops will attend services Oct. 20 to officially mark the church’s 90th anniversary, in addition to guest clergy from other parishes.

In attendance will be Metropolitan Hilarion Kapral, the ruling bishop of the church's Eastern America and New York diocese, as well as Bishop Nicholas Olhovsky of Manhattan and Bishop Jerome Shaw.

"Our liturgical day starts on Saturday night and ends on Sunday, so we have a relatively long service on Saturday night and then celebrate liturgy on Sunday morning," Jakimowicz said.

The priest has been at St. Nicholas since last year, and said he has tried to focus on youth as the future of the parish.

The church's first services on Lake Street in 1929 were attended mostly by people who lived in the surrounding neighborhood.

The church community has changed since then, and now attracts worshipers from as far away as New York and New Jersey.

Paul Przybylski, a reader at the church, grew up in the area and now lives in Norwich.

"When this parish was first founded, most of the Russians lived in the neighborhood. They could walk here," he said. "Now we have people showing up from all over the place."

As for the coming festivities, "I don't think this parish has ever seen three bishops at once and these two miraculous icons all together," Jakimowicz said. "It's kind of a big event for us — all this grace coming from the church gathering in our little jewel of a temple here."

- Source: [ctinsider.com](https://www.ctinsider.com)