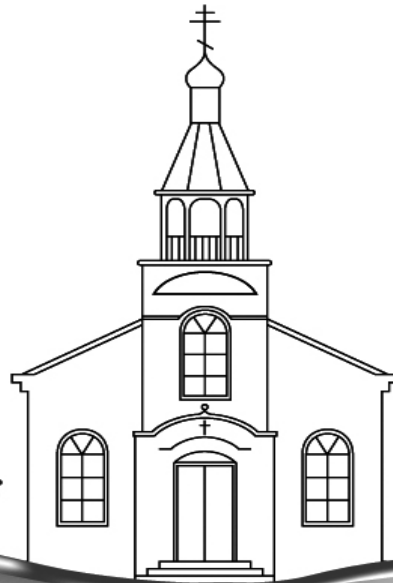


**russian  
orthodox  
church of**



**saint  
nicholas**

**newcastle**

**ABN 71 384 615 722**

# **Annual Report 2013-2014**

## INTRODUCTION

The Parish Council of Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Wallsend, is pleased to present its 2014 Annual Report.

According to the Normal Parish By-Laws ('the By-Laws') of parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia, it is the objective of each parish to assist the faithful by making available Orthodox Christian prayers, sacraments, teaching and discipline, and by facilitating worthy activity. To this end, the aims of the parish encompass care for the church building and its material needs, provision for the clergy and support for the higher church authorities, work to help others in need, and Orthodox Christian educational work.

For the information of parish members, the Diocesan authorities, and the wider church community, this Annual Report summarises and reviews parish life and administration for the period from 1 July 2013 until 30 June 2014, considering the achievements of our parish in relation to the objective and aims set out in the By-Laws. It also provides an overview of other activities and looks at needs and challenges in the immediate future and in the years ahead.

## THE PARISH COUNCIL

The By-Laws allow for a Parish Council that is made up of the rector and other assigned clergy, the Warden, and such lay members as are elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the parish. The By-Laws indicate that five lay members of the Parish Council should be elected in addition to a warden and a Head Sister.

The only clergyman assigned to our parish is the Rector, Priest James Carles. Father James was appointed to our parish in December 2002. During this time, he has also served the parish of Saint Panteleimon in Gosford. In September 2013 it was 12 years since his ordination to the priesthood and in November 2013 it was 15 years since his ordination to the diaconate. In recognition of his service, Father James was in July 2013 awarded the right to wear the gold pectoral cross.

During the year under review the Warden, elected in 2011 for a third three-year term, was Nikolai Goura. Nikolai has fulfilled his duties faithfully, attending every service and working steadfastly for the good order and improvement of our parish. The other lay members of the Parish Council elected at the AGM convened in September 2013 are Anna Morhun, Irene Lupish, Olga Bogacheva, Lucea Szabunia and Anu Kinnunen.

Subdeacon Vitaly Lupish holds an honorary position on the Parish Council but because of illness no longer participates in its work. Subdeacon Vitaly also acted as a parish trustee until 2014 when the role of parish trustees was formally taken over by the Russian Orthodox Church (NSW) Property Trust. The Parish Council gratefully acknowledges his many years of service as a trustee and his assistance in the transition to the new trust arrangements.

## PARISH ACTIVITIES

### ***Making available Orthodox Christian prayers and sacraments***

#### *Background*

For some years now it has been our custom to serve Matins on Saturday evenings and Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings of the second and fourth weekends of each month. In addition, All-night Vigil and Divine Liturgy are served on certain Great Feasts. On the weekends and Great Feasts when there are no services in our parish our rector serves in Gosford. To assist our parishioners and friends in

remembering our service schedule, a small magnetic parish calendar is distributed each year with the second and fourth weekends prominently marked.

Our parish maintains a strong commitment to the conduct of the divine services in Church Slavonic. We have nevertheless increased the use of English in recent years. This has in part been motivated by practical necessity, and in part by pastoral concern. Our parish now includes a number of people for whom Church Slavonic is difficult to read or understand, even amongst those for whom Russian is their first language.

At present the variable portions of the evening services are read or sung primarily in English, with the fixed portions, litanies and exclamations remaining in Church Slavonic. At Divine Liturgy the choir sings in Church Slavonic. The Epistle and Gospel at Divine Liturgy are generally read in both languages, and certain of the litanies are intoned in English. To assist with understanding, any special petitions for the sick, for travellers, and for special needs, as well as prayers of intercession or blessing on special occasions, are generally intoned or read in English.

In November 2013 Nataliya Rahim was appointed conductor of our choir. Born in Gomel, Belarus, in 1981, Nataliya studied music theory, piano and choir singing at the Sokolovsky College of the Arts before continuing her studies at the University of Arts and Culture in Minsk. After her marriage she moved to the United Kingdom and then to Australia, singing in Russian Orthodox church choirs in Melbourne and Adelaide before coming to our parish. Our choir has improved greatly under Nataliya's direction and we are grateful for the professionalism and dedication she has brought to the role.

Sermons are given at every Divine Liturgy and delivered only in English. They generally focus on a practical theme drawn from the appointed readings from the Holy Scriptures or the liturgical commemoration on the day.

Sadly very few people attend our evening services, a trend that is observable in most parishes of our Diocese. Sunday morning services are usually attended by at least 40 worshippers, with more present on significant feast-days and during particular seasons. Age and infirmity have had a noticeable impact on church attendance over the last few years.

Four service schedules are drawn up by the rector each year: Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring.

During the year under review a total of 83 services were held, slightly more than in the two previous years. There were 37 evening services, 36 Divine Liturgies, and 11 other services. Details are as follows:

<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>Matins or Vigil</b>	<b>Divine Liturgy</b>	<b>Other services</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Winter 2013</b> July-August	5	5	0	10
<b>Spring 2013</b> September-November	7	8	1	16
<b>Summer 2013-14</b> December-February	11	11	2	24
<b>Autumn 2014</b> March-May	12	10	6	28
<b>Winter 2014</b> June	2	2	1	5
<b>Total</b>	37	36	10	83

The "other" services conducted included vespers services during Great Lent, blessings of water, general anointing, and general memorial services.

Major services for the year included the Great Feasts of the Transfiguration, the Exaltation of the Cross, the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, the Nativity of Christ, the Meeting of the Lord, the Annunciation of the Mother of God, the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), and the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles (Pentecost).

The feast of the Nativity of Christ was celebrated with great solemnity. At the litia on the eve of the feast there was a procession around the church, and on the day of the feast there was a moleben of thanksgiving to mark the anniversary of the deliverance of the Russian Church and Empire from the invasion of the French and twelve other nations. Following Divine Liturgy around 60 people gathered in the church hall for a festive lunch, afterwards watching a Nativity play performed by the parish children.

We had services on January 18, the Eve of the Great Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast having been the patronal feast of the former Russian Orthodox parish of the Theophany in Mayfield, it was noted that 2014 marked the twentieth anniversary of the founding of that parish and the fifth anniversary of its closure.

A particularly noteworthy service was the visit to our parish in late January 2014 of His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia and Ruling Bishop of the Australian and New Zealand Diocese. The occasion of Vladyka's visit was the blessing of our new "Golgotha" Cross and the beginning of celebrations to mark 65 years of Orthodoxy in the Hunter Valley. In an unusual service for our small parish, four priests and a protodeacon concelebrated with Vladyka.

Other notable services were for Saint Nicholas on 19 December and on 25 May. The services on 25 May were for our parish feast-day – the Translation of the Relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra in Lycia to Bari – transferred from 22 May. On both days there was a moleben at which all our parishioners were commemorated.

On the Feast of Feasts, Pascha, we did not have a midnight service, it being the turn of the Gosford parish for this service. Instead, in anticipation of the feast we had the services of Midnight Office and Paschal Matins early on the evening of Great and Holy Saturday, followed by the blessing of Easter eggs and cakes. Over 100 people were in attendance.

We also had Vespers with the rite of asking forgiveness on Forgiveness Sunday, and the customary "Moleben for the conversion of those in error" on the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday in Great Lent.

During the Fifth Week of Great Lent the Service of General Anointing was served, with approximately twenty parishioners attending and receiving anointing with oil.

In 2013-14 we continued the practice of serving general memorial services on certain Saturdays on which the church appoints commemorations of the departed. In addition, in December 2013 a memorial litia was served to mark the fifth anniversary of the repose of Patriarch Alexey II, a wise leader of the Russian Orthodox Church during an extraordinary time in its history. In April 2014 we observed Radonitsa, the Day of Rejoicing, visiting Wallsend and Sandgate Cemeteries and praying there for our ever-memorable departed relatives and friends.

In the last days of Winter and during the Spring months we commemorate a number of events of significance to our parish. These are the arrival in Australia on 19 August 1949 – the Great Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord – of Archpriest John Lupish and his family; the first Russian Orthodox services in the Hunter Valley on 28 August 1949, the Great Feast of the Dormition; the patronal feast of the Holy Protection Church in Greta, the first Russian Orthodox church in the Hunter Valley; and the anniversary of Father John's repose on 21 November 1977. The Spring months are thus a time of particular focus on

the heritage of our parish. These commemorations had a special significance in 2014 as it was 65 years since Father John's arrival and the first Russian Orthodox services.

In addition to scheduled services, there are many services of 'need' in our parish. These include baptisms, weddings and funerals, services in memory of a departed family member, and services of intercession in particular circumstances.

There were eight baptisms in the year under review, three of adults and five of children. The adults baptised were Dean (Nicholas) Crawford, Cheryl (Juliana) Hayward, and Martin Kalyniuk. The children baptised were Bridget Morrison, David Evteev, Alizetta (Vasilissa) Dawson, Dominic Rahim, and Ava Barton. Another adult, Jani Piironen, was received into the Orthodox Church by chrismation. The number of baptism is the highest number in our parish for many years.

There were two weddings. In February 2014 Vladimir Shatrov and Cheryl Hayward were married, and in June 2014, Andrew Martinov and Holly Nairn.

There were two funerals at our church during the review period. The first, in September 2013, was of Michael Jermolaew, one of our oldest parishioners and a builder of our church. The other, in March 2014, was of George Timonin. May God grant them rest!

With Metropolitan Hilarion's blessing, the Romanian Orthodox Community of the Holy Apostle Andrew continued to make use of our church. This community is led by Father Theodor Postelnicescu, a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Australia and New Zealand. As Father Theodor was overseas for part of 2014, Romanian Orthodox services were less frequent. In August 2013 His Grace Bishop Mihail, Ruling Bishop of Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese, presided at Divine Liturgy in our church.

Subdeacon Luke Goura served the parish in a number of ways during the year under review. Our senior altar-server, he also read the *Apostol* in both Church Slavonic and English at Divine Liturgy. Subdeacon Luke also took responsibility for changing the vestments in the sanctuary in preparation for the Divine Services. As of May 2014, Subdeacon Luke had served our parish as reader and subdeacon for 10 years. His service has been diligent and faithful.

During the course of 2013 we observed the four-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Romanov Dynasty, commemorating the Royal Martyrs at the dismissal of each service. On the final Sunday of 2013 according to the Julian calendar we served a moleben to the Royal Martyrs and served a litia for the repose of the souls of all the departed members of the Royal House.

### ***Caring for the church building and its material needs***

In 2014 it was fifty years since the completion and consecration of our present church.

As in previous years, a contractor regularly attended to basic maintenance of the parish grounds. Jenny Millard has cared for the gardens.

Our Ladies' Auxiliary has attended to the cleaning and decoration of the church and hall. Flowers were purchased and arranged for special occasions. Cleaning and the adornment of the church were undertaken under the direction of the Head Sister, Anna Morhun.

Our Ladies' Auxiliary purchased two new sets of altar-server vestments, one set in red and the other in white. The work of the sisters of the Presentation Convent in Bungarby, NSW, each new set of vestments was formally blessed in church at the end of Divine Liturgy.

Matushka Marie Carles continued to bake prosphora for each Divine Liturgy and the five loaves blessed on Great Feasts. The flour for prosphora has for some years been generally donated by the Kfoury family from the Gosford parish.

***Undertaking Orthodox Christian educational work***

For many years, the primary means of formal educational work in our parish has been preaching. Sermons are given on every Sunday and major feast-day. In addition, instructive homilies are given at services of need such as baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Significant emphasis is placed on learning in a liturgical context. All who wish to assist with the reading and singing in church are encouraged to do so, thereby becoming more familiar with the order of services and with the various books used in the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church.

To the extent possible the blessing of new candles, icons, vestments, and honey and other items – in addition to the regular blessings of fruit and Paschal foods – is incorporated into the common worship of the parish. The prayers of the Orthodox Church appointed for such blessings are theologically rich and instructive for the faithful to hear.

Services of need are also used as an opportunity to teach. For example, the scheduling of weddings involves some discussion of the calendar of the Orthodox Church, the cycle of feasts and fasts, and the principle of putting spiritual things ahead of worldly things. Similarly, preparation for funeral services provides an opportunity for the faithful to learn about the Orthodox response to death and the customs that reflect and reinforce our faith.

In 2013 and 2014 the Parish Council provided parish families and households with a wall calendar in Russian and English that included details of feasts and fasts – including the rules of fasting – and the readings for each day. Besides being a warmly-received gesture, this has been extremely helpful in ensuring that our parishioners understand what is happening in church life. The 2014 wall calendar, designed by Olga Bogacheva, was an attractive commemorative calendar marking 65 years of Russian Orthodoxy in the Hunter Valley and 50 years since the consecration of our church.

Our parish website and Facebook page, discussed elsewhere in this report, also assisted with Orthodox Christian educational work by sharing information about the practical aspects of the life of the parish, the Diocese, and the wider Orthodox Church. It is expected that this aspect of both the website and Facebook will be strengthened in the year ahead.

Two young mothers in the parish, Olga Bogacheva and Anastasia Harwood, continued to co-ordinate the Russian-language playgroup, “Teremok”, that they established in September 2009. Meeting weekly in the church hall, this playgroup gives mothers and their children an opportunity to gather for fellowship and learning in an Orthodox Christian environment. In September 2013 the playgroup celebrated four years of operation.

***Providing for the clergy and supporting the higher church authorities***

Our parish took the important step in April 2014 of making available to the parish rector an expense account – a non-taxable fringe benefit – that allowed him to reduce his secular work commitments by one and a half days each fortnight. As the Gosford parish in which he also serves has done the same, he now has three days per fortnight available for pastoral work. This arrangement, one that involves a significant new financial commitment for the parish, is a trial that will be formally reviewed in February-March 2015.

Honoraria are paid to hierarchs, deacons and sub-deacons visiting our parish on special occasions. As our parish rector has been present for every scheduled service, there has been no need to provide for clergy on a relief basis.

Parishes of the Diocese have a responsibility to financially support the higher church authorities – the Diocesan and Synodal administrations. Such financial support is collected from parishes for the Diocese

in the form of a 15 per cent levy on both candle sales and the first collection plate, and for the Synod in the form of a 4.5 per cent levy on candle sales, the first collection plate, donations, membership tithes, prosphora sales, bank interest and other revenue. The levies on candle sales are applied by the Diocese when candles are purchased from the Diocesan Candle Store.

Levies are payable at six month intervals. In February levies are payable on income received in the period from July-December, and in August levies are payable on income received from January-June. Our parish takes seriously its responsibility to support the higher church authorities in this way.

During the year under review, Diocesan levies totalling \$3,404.89 were paid. In addition, we paid levies of \$393.00 on candle purchases.

### ***Working to help others in need***

In the year under review, a total of \$1849.00 was collected for charitable causes at the request of the Diocesan authorities. This is more than in 2012-13, and almost three times the amount collected in 2011-12. The breakdown of Diocesan collections is as follows:

<b>Annual Diocesan Collection Beneficiaries</b>	<b>When taken</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Synod of Bishops Charitable Fund	November 2013	\$640.00
Maxim Lvov	February 2014	\$457.00
Orthodox Action Sydney and Melbourne	February 2014	\$0.00
Holy Trinity Seminary, Jordanville	March 2014	\$187.00
Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, Jerusalem	Palm Sunday 2014	\$190.00
Victims of Serbian Floods	May-June 2014	\$375.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$1849.00</b>

The collections for the child Maxim Lvov and the victims of Serbian floods taken up in response to special appeals from Metropolitan Hilarion.

All of these monies had been paid on to the Diocesan authorities.

Regrettably, the mandatory collection for Orthodox Action in February 2014 was overlooked. To address this oversight, a donation of \$250.00 was made in December 2014.

As in previous years, collections were advertised in advance and envelopes with details of the date and purpose of each collection were distributed in church.

### ***Other activities***

#### *Improvements to the church and hall*

Major work was undertaken in the church hall in 2011-12 and 2012-13. This work provided us with a modern semi-commercial kitchen and increased our capacity to cater for special events in parish life. Only very minor additional work was undertaken in 2013-14: the replacement of the side doors of the church hall, making a new hall entrance, and the fitting of screen doors to this entrance.

Work on the proposed extension to the church remained steady throughout the year but moved at a much slower pace than expected. This was because of the need to ensure that the parish title deeds reflected the arrangements put into place by the *Russian Orthodox Church (NSW) Property Trust Act 1991* and the need to obtain approval from Newcastle City Council. Since the end of the year under review approval has been obtained and the foundations of the extension have been laid. Mr Bill Reid, a solicitor from the Gosford parish, did a great deal of work for us on the title deeds, and our warden Nikolai Goura had worked hard to gain approval for the extension.

### *Iconography*

In January 2014 we took delivery of a large new “Golgotha” Cross, the work of Sydney iconographer Dimitri Lihachov. A well-known and widely-respected artist, Dimitri studied traditional techniques of fresco and egg tempera at the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery in New York and in Jerusalem.

The new Cross has been a beautiful addition to our church. Metropolitan Hilarion’s visit to our parish for the blessing of this Cross was a significant and joyful event in parish life.

The Parish Council has for some years been considering the possibility of replacing the iconostasis and frescoing the interior of our church in traditional Russian-Byzantine style, thereby further beautifying our small church. This project has been set aside pending the completion of alterations to the church building. Other less significant elements of the iconography project will be pursued as resources allow.

### *Parish life*

A roster operated throughout the year to ensure that parishioners and friends had an opportunity for regular fellowship and to talk and relax over light refreshments after each Sunday service. Two ladies worked together each Sunday on which we had a service, with each pair on duty once every three months.

Our Ladies’ Auxiliary also prepared small bunches of flowers for Pentecost, gift-bags for our children at Christmas, and pussy-willows for Palm Sunday. Much work was done to prepare for the Metropolitan’s visit in January.

During the year, pilmeni, piroshki, vareniki, cakes and other items were prepared for sale by the Ladies’ Auxiliary and friends. In October 2013 a fundraising Spring Bazaar was held in the church grounds. Jenny Millard continued to operate a small fundraising stall in the church hall. The Parish Council is grateful for her ongoing work raising money for the needs of the parish.

Just before the beginning of Great Lent in February 2014, a successful pancake night was held at the John Gebhardt Centre in Waratah, the home of the Newcastle and Hunter Region Ethnic Communities Council. Helped by Elena Ferguson from Northern Settlement Services and Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian ladies from across the Hunter Region, our Ladies’ Auxiliary raised over \$2,400.00.

Our parish website was redeveloped during the second half of 2013 with the assistance of a US-based company, Orthodox Web Solutions. The attractive site was designed by Olga Bogacheva and incorporates the imagery of our treasured “Newcastle” Icon of the Mother of God. It combines a blog-style home page with news of coming and recent events in the life of the parish and the Diocese with information about parish history and administration and practical aspects of baptism, weddings, funerals and other services of need. New content is being added to the website regularly.

Published in September 2013, the new site had by the end of June 2014 received over 9,500 visits, and now consistently receives nearly 2,000 visits each month. Contact with visitors to the site and the statistical data available to us indicates that it is not only our parishioners and friends who visit but also the faithful from around the world – over a third of visits to our site are from the United States and Canada, and many are from Russia, Ukraine and other Orthodox countries – and those interested in learning more about the Orthodox faith.

The parish also has a Facebook page that is fully integrated with the website and which presents photographs and less formal news items.



*Diocesan life*

Our small parish has been engaged in the life of the Diocese to the extent possible given our distance from the major centres of Diocesan life.

Father James visited those parishes in Sydney that he could on the occasion of their patronal feasts. In 2013-14, this included the cathedral in Strathfield, the parishes in Cabramatta, Carlton, and Fairfield, and the convent in Kentlyn. In June 2014 he and a small number of people from our parish visited the Holy Trinity Monastery in Monkerai, near Dungog, for its patronal feast on the second day of Pentecost. In 2014 Father James also participated in the festive services at the Archbishop's Chapel in Croydon on the second day of Christmas and the Service of General Anointing at Strathfield during Great Lent.

Father James and Irene Lupish represented our parish at the Diocesan Assembly in December 2013. Father James was Deputy Chair of the Assembly and was later elected as one of the clergy members of the 2013-2016 Diocesan Council. In January 2014 he was appointed to the Diocesan Council Secretariat and in February 2014 he was appointed Secretary of the Governance Committee. He has since participated actively in the work of both the Diocesan Council and the Governance Committee.

Father James participated in the pastoral conference held in Sydney during Great Lent 2014 and in the Divine Services held in conjunction with the Lenten conference.

In August 2013 we had festive services on Saint Vladimir's Day, a day on which the whole Russian Orthodox Church celebrated the 1025<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. Our services included the blessing of water before Divine Liturgy and a cross procession afterwards, and in place of a sermon Father James read the important *Message of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to Archpastors, Priests, Monastics and Laity on the Occasion of the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'*. In January and April 2014 respectively Patriarch Kirill's Nativity Epistle and Metropolitan Hilarion's Paschal Epistles were read aloud in church. In these small ways we have endeavoured to strengthen the links between the faithful in Newcastle and the hierarchy and life of our Church.

***Plans and challenges***

In 2013-14 we identified our key plans and challenges for the year ahead as the construction and fit-out of the extension to the church, the need to improve parish administration and financial record-keeping, and the strengthening of parish life.

The process of gaining the necessary approval for the church extension was much slower than expected. In particular, the need to formally transfer the title of our church property from the sole surviving trustee, Subdeacon Vitaly Lupish, to the Russian Orthodox Church (NSW) Property Trust was time consuming. This was not accomplished until March 2014. Permission to build was gained in October 2014 and the foundations were laid in November 2014. We look forward to the completion of this extension in 2015, together with the refurbishment of the sacristy, the sanding and polishing of the church floor, and other modifications to the church interior.

Not all that we hoped to accomplish in the area of parish administration and financial record-keeping during 2013-14 was possible. In part this was because of the parish rector's increased involvement in Diocesan administration. We understand that this work also benefits our parish. Improvements in parish administration remain an important priority for the 2014-15 Parish Council.

In 2015 we hope to begin publication of a parish newsletter that will address those needs not met by the parish website and the Facebook page.