

Liberty Hill's Orthodox Church is small, but thriving

By WAYLON CUNNINGHAM
Staff Writer

Father Irineos, a bishop at the St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Liberty Hill, says the Sunday service at his church uses the same liturgy as was practiced in Constantinople more than 16 centuries ago.

Well, he adds, except for the fact that they use English — and the holy chanting is “definitely more Americanized.”

Buried deep in the countryside 20 minutes to the north of Highway 29, Liberty Hill's small but growing Orthodox mission comes as a surprise to many.

Of the dozen regular attendees, only some were raised in the faith. Others, like Irineos, converted as adults. Most are local families, but a few commute, like the couple that sometimes drives up from San Antonio.

All find something in the promise of timeless tradition.

A Sunday morning earlier this month saw 16 men, women and children crowd into St. Andrew's small but echo-filled sanctuary for the chant-filled service.

The oldest sat in chairs pulled to the side. Most stayed standing for the entirety of the hour and a half. Such is the Orthodox tradition, and one of the many differences from other Western Christian services that a visitor might notice.

The service that Sunday did not begin right away. It was a special occasion.

The church's chanter, Gerasimos, had for the past year served as a “lay reader,” chanting only in the limited role allowed by someone not officially ordained by the higher-ups of the Orthodox Church. Sunday, he was tonsured, or shaved. The ceremony marks his ordaining with the proper authority to read the liturgy to the congregation at the mission. He had been blessed to do so at a meeting of American Orthodox church leaders in Greece held earlier in the year.

The rest of the service progressed as it normally does. Opening prayers were given, followed by a sermon, the Eucharist, and closing prayers.

“Although the structure of the service itself is not that different from



In a tonsuring ceremony, Father Irineos ordains St. Andrew's chanter, Gerasimos, with the proper authority to read the church's liturgy aloud. Services at the Orthodox Church are frequently punctuated with call-and-response chants between the two men, though Gerasimos has until now acted in an unofficial capacity as a “lay reader.” His ordaining was approved earlier this year by American Orthodox church leaders in Greece. (Courtesy Photo)

a Lutheran or Catholic service, the form of worship is different,” said Irineos, who sports a long beard and flowing black robes.

Woven throughout all of it are back-and-forth responses sung between Irineos and Gerasimos. The congregation joins in some of the hymns. No instruments are ever used.

Irineos calls the chanting “Americanized” because they try to soften some of the notes. The traditional Byzantine style, he explains, “can be a little harsh on the Western ear.”

For him, its one of the ways his church follows the traditional evangelizing model of Orthodox Christianity -- to reflect the culture around it. He says that while this approach is used elsewhere in the world, it is unusual in the United States.

“The United States has always been an aberration of Orthodoxy, because we're an immigrant country,” he says. “The Greeks would get here and send for a Greek priest. The Arabs would get here and send for an Arab priest. The Russians would get here and send for a Russian priest, and so on.”

thodoxy has traditionally evangelized in the countries it has spread to.

The emphasis on spreading Orthodoxy is also why Irineos holds his services in English, and hopes to one day offer Saturday services in Spanish. Many of the Orthodox churches in the Austin area are given in Greek, Russian, or other languages.

However, Irineos draws a distinction between blending into a culture, and bending to it.

St. Andrew's is what is called a Greek Old Calendarist church, which Irineos likens to the “traditionalists of the traditionalists.” The Greek Old Calendarists split from other Orthodox churches in the early 20th Century over the adoption of the Papal Gregorian Calendar and other liturgical reforms.

The Greek Old Calendar is set 13 days ahead of the calendar used overwhelmingly by secular society in the United States and other countries. As a result, churches such as St. Andrew's observe Christmas on the day that the secular calendar marks as Jan. 7.

BUSINESS

Dana's on having

By RACHEL MADISON
Staff Writer

When you walk into Dana's Hair Salon in downtown Liberty Hill, you might feel like you just stepped onto the set of the movie “Steel Magnolias”—or at least that's how some of Dana Clark's clients describe the feel of her salon.

The 1989 movie, which starred Julia Roberts and Dolly Parton, has several scenes set at Truvy's Beauty Salon, a place where customers felt like family and could come to talk about the good and the bad going on in their lives.

Clark, owner and stylist at Dana's Hair Salon, said her salon does feel like Truvy's at times, especially because many of her clients have been coming to her for hair services since they were children.

“They come in and you know their story and they know yours,” she said. “You cry, they cry— I love being a big family and watching them

See DANA'S, Page 8



Junior guard Gracie Whitten (#4) leads Panthers are 2-0 in district play and 17-2

Ladies beat Bu

By LANCE CATCHINGS
Sports Writer

The Liberty Hill Lady Panthers hosted Burnet Friday in their second

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ORTHODOX *Continued from Page 1*

The calendar is just one of the many markers of St. Andrew's steadfast dedication to tradition.

"I go back to the scriptures," Irineos says, "and Jesus Christ then was the same as he is today, and tomorrow— and if we really believe that, then our worship of Christ should reflect that same sort of constancy."

Irineos says he was in his late 30s the first time he walked into an Orthodox service.

"It was so bizarre and so strange to me," he says. "I wanted to stay and figure out exactly what I had just seen."

The effect is common, he says.

He started the Liberty Hill mission after the church he previously

attended, an evangelical Orthodox mission in Georgetown, closed in 2011. He and another follower of that church, hoping to continue, found an available storefront location on Highway 29 in Liberty Hill.

They knew that Liberty Hill was a growing area, he said, but the church authorities that had sanctioned the Georgetown mission were not interested in a town they saw as too small. Still, they were able to secure the blessing of a Greek bishop.

"He was very enthusiastic about the evangelism part of the mission work," Irineos said.

When St. Andrew's opened in 2013, its attendance was largely limited to Irineos' family and another family who had previously at-

tended the Georgetown church.

After a year, Irineos was called to Greece. The bishop that had blessed their mission told Irineos that he was now to become their actual, official priest. While Irineos had been giving services in an unofficial capacity, there are many parts to the liturgy that only a priest is allowed to perform.

After Irineos was ordained and able to serve the full cycle, word of the church spread, and it grew.

Two or three members became six or seven, and then nine or 10, 12 or 13. Military personnel stationed at Fort Hood and Camp Mabry sometimes stop by. A couple from San Antonio has begun to attend some Sundays, as St. Andrew's is one

of the few regionally that uses the Greek Old Calendar.

Now, some Sunday services even push 18.

The congregation moved out of the highway storefront property earlier this year. Since October, they have met for service in a new, dedicated Orthodox church structure built adjacent to Irineos' house, where the congregation socializes after services for lunch and coffee.

The new sanctuary, though already ornate and colorful, is still bare by Orthodox standards, Irineos says.

"Our walls need to be covered with icons, all the way up to the ceiling and the dome," he said. But, "it's a start."

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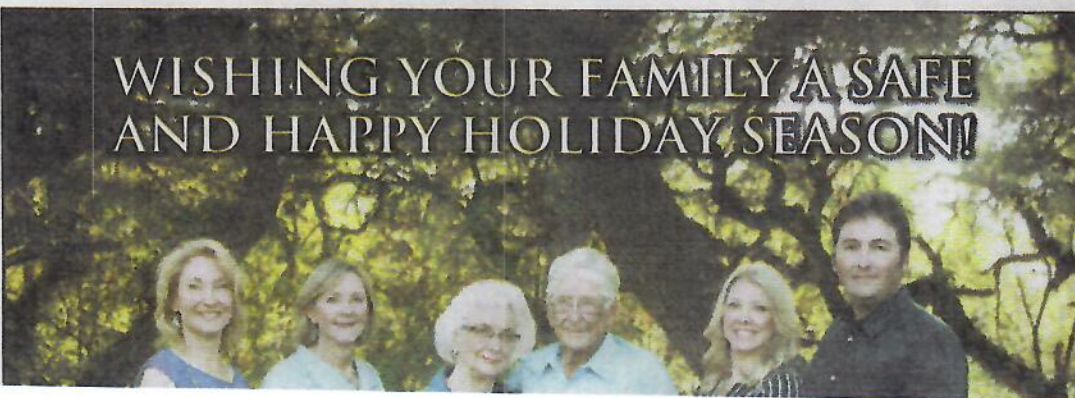


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ST. MATTHEW 8

1. Continuation. Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his leprosy was healed at the same hour.

14. ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto them.

16. ¶ Whensoever was come, they brought into him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.

17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, He sent



HOMETOWN FLAVORS

Traditional Greek Christmas Bread

is difficult, but rewarding

BY NGHAM

It is almost Greek Old Timers of Liberty Hill. Orthodox Christmas Day is 13 days before the U.S. government actually Dec. 25. Calendarists, Christmas) to 25 is Jan. 7

in the night of the two Santa Clauses shall be a good and Christmas at enough of just come by have a second their Irineos, drew Ortho-

dox Church.

There are, however, some differences beyond a calendar date in which the traditional Orthodox Christmas season might not resemble the egnog marathon familiar to many of us.

One of the biggest is the Nativity Fast. In the 40 days leading up to Christmas Eve, believers are to refrain from eating meat, eggs, dairy, fish, wine and olive oil.

At least to me, this would be a diet requiring discipline of Biblical proportions.

The end result is to make Christmas a "very, very festive day," Irineos says.

This week he shared a recipe for Christopsomo, or Christmas Bread, which is a Greek Orthodox sweet leavened bread eaten during the holiday season. The recipe makes two loaves. Between the milk, wine and olive oil, this is definitely a treat for Christmas Eve or later.

Much like the fast, this very traditional recipe is lengthy and involved—but the treasure at the end makes it all worth it.

Christopsomo, Greek Christmas Bread

Ingredients:

- 8 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 ½ tablespoons of dry yeast
- 1 cup of water (warm, 105 degrees)
- 1 cup red wine (warm)
- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup brandy
- 2 oranges (zested)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 ½ cup raisins
- 1 ½ cup walnuts (coarsely chopped)
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- 1 tablespoon of anise seed (crushed, or 1 tablespoon of grated gum mastic)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon (ground)
- 1 teaspoon cloves (ground)
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg (ground)
- 1 to 2 tablespoons of milk

Directions:

1. Mix the yeast with ½ cup of warm water and 2 tablespoons of flour, stir until dissolved and set aside for 10 minutes, until it bubbles.



Traditional Greek Christmas bread indulges many of the food groups restricted in the fast leading up to Christmas. (Courtesy Photo)

2. In a large mixing bowl, sift the salt with 2/3 of the flour. Make a well in the center of the flour and pour in the yeast mixture, the remaining warm water, and the wine. Mix until a soft dough forms, cover with waxed paper and a damp towel, and set aside to rise for 1 ½ to 2 hours until doubled in bulk.
3. Punch the dough down and knead for several minutes until any air pockets are gone. Sift in the remaining flour, add the oil, orange juice, brandy, and grated orange peel.
4. In a small bowl, mix the sugar, raisins, walnuts, pine nuts, gum mastic or anise, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg until blended, and add to the dough.
5. Knead well until the dough is firm and doesn't stick (about 10 minutes), cover, and allow to rise for ½ hour.
6. On a lightly buttered baking pan, shape the bread into two circular loaves, about 8 inches in diameter. (You can also press whole walnuts into the top at this point for style). Cover with a dry cloth and a damp cloth over that, and place in a warm place to rise again, until doubled in size.
7. Using a floured knife, score a cross into the top of the loaves, and place one whole, unshelled walnut at the center. Brush the bread with milk and scatter with sesame seeds.
8. Place a pan with at least 1 inch of water in the bottom of the oven and preheat to 450 degrees. Place the bread in the preheated oven for 15 minutes, then remove the pan with the water, reduce heat to 390 degrees, and bake for another 25-30 minutes.
9. Remove from oven, brush lightly with water, and cool on a rack.