

# St. Mark Evangelizer

Newsletter for Saint Mark Orthodox Church - 7124 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20817

Volume 19 - Number 1

January - March 2019 Issue



Saint Mark Church is a parish of the Orthodox Church in America, Archdiocese of Washington DC, under the omaphor of His Beatitude, Metropolitan, Tikhon.

**Divine Liturgy:** Sunday 9:30AM

Weekday Feasts 10:00AM

**Confession:** Saturday 5:00PM

Vespers: Saturday 5:30PM

**Church School:** Following Sunday Divine Liturgy (September - May)

**Rector:** Archpriest, Gregory Safchuk

**Telephone:** (301) 229-6300

[www.saintmarkoca.org](http://www.saintmarkoca.org)

## Turning to the Way of Repentance

"In spite of our sinfulness, in spite of the darkness surrounding our souls, the Grace of the Holy Spirit, conferred by baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, still shines in our hearts with the inextinguishable light of Christ ...

and when the sinner turns to the way of repentance the light smooths away every trace of the sins committed, clothing the former sinner in the garments of incorruption, spun of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. It is this acquisition of the Holy Spirit about which I have been speaking."

St. Seraphim of Sarov

## Cheap Grace Revisited

Why pay more? Get it for less! After having been pummeled by the forces of merchandizing during the holiday season, I'm prompted to write about the "discount" concept that sometimes threatens to resonate from that into our spiritual lives. The term "cheap grace" can be traced back to a book written by German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called *The Cost of Discipleship*, published in 1937. In that book, Bonhoeffer defined "cheap grace" as "the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline.

Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ." Notice what is emphasized in Bonhoeffer's definition of cheap grace and what is de-emphasized. The emphasis is on the benefits of Christianity without the costs involved; hence, the adjective "cheap" to describe it. Contemporary versions of this thinking have lead to what I've often heard in conversations by those who declare that they are "spiritual" but not religious. Some say that they "believe in God", but don't see the necessity to "congregate", be bound by doctrine, or participate in any particular religious rites, rituals, ceremonies or sacraments.

We might think that since the concept of cheap grace and the debate about it arose very late in history and outside of the Orthodox mindset, that it doesn't apply to us and our thinking. Yet, as is the case with most temptation in it's subtlety and pervasiveness,

we can find it all of a sudden "in us" without ever having noticed how it got there.

We can go back much further in history - past Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all the way to the Bible and find the underpinnings of this thought in direct opposition to Christ Himself. Jesus is asked by a ruler/rich young man (depending on which Gospel version the account appears - Mt. 19:16, Mk. 10:17 or Lk. 18:18), "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Implied in the question seems to be a certain minimalism. But in our Lord's answer, He takes the question far past a minimal "good deed". At first, He replies by saying to keep the commandments. When these have been satisfied, He then says: "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Quite apart from one's financial state, this advocates a maximum or absolute commitment of the heart.

Up until the 4th. century of the Christian era, many deadly and violent persecutions arose causing anguish, suffering and claiming the lives of thousands of believers. For 300+ years, the cost of discipleship was high. The establishment of the Byzantine Imperial Church changed that. Slowly and subtly, the perception that the Christian faith would not demand your life emerged.

How much is Christ worth to us? Though the Grace of the Holy Spirit is freely given, we must still take up our cross in order to follow Christ and labor to acquire it.

- Fr. Gregory

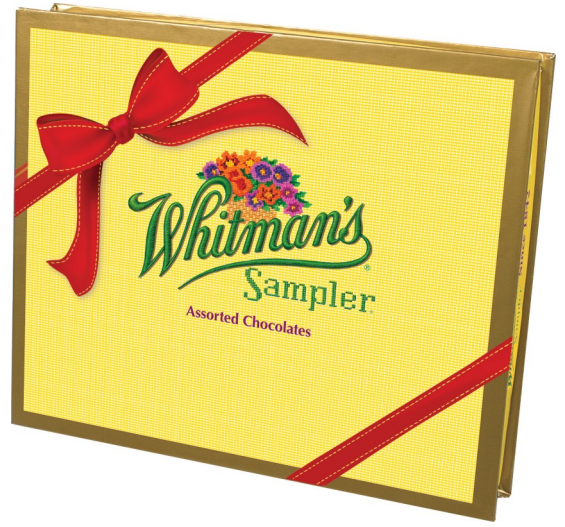




## BLESSINGS?

*Submitted by: Matushka Alexandra Safchuk*

I once knew a priest who often signed his correspondence with, “Asking God’s choicest blessings on you, I remain...” When I would read this, I would imagine that God was looking into a Whitman’s Sampler of chocolates and selecting just the right one. (Please, let it be the orange cream!) I wondered if God had blessings that weren’t the “choicest” and what it would mean to be the recipient of the not so choice blessings, the kind that someone might take a bite out of, realize it was the nougat or some nasty jelly, and try and hide it back in the box.



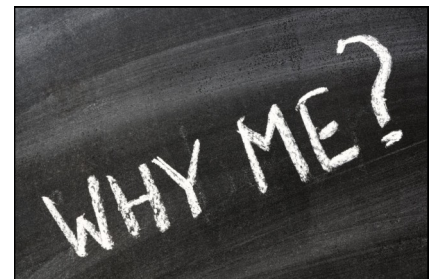
Since there are blessings that don’t seem like blessings, especially at first, we might not always display a keenly developed sense of gratitude. I have particular difficulty giving thanks for moments of humiliation and sorrow, even though I have read the lives of numerous saints who were grateful, no matter what the trial. I am thinking here in particular of St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, Grand Duchess of Russia, who sang hymns from within the mineshaft where she met her death. Accounts of this amazing behavior come to us from the very people who dumped her and those with her into the mineshaft. They were amazed. I am amazed.



St. Elizabeth brought her A game to the mineshaft that day. It was an impossible circumstance, and who would blame her for depression or anger or even hysteria? What did it take to be able to bring her A game to her death? Probably a lifetime of practice. A rich inner life and relationship with God from which to draw strength, to display dignity, to remain focused, to sing hymns.

In order to draw on that relationship with God, Elizabeth needed to nurture her rich inner life. While all around her violence and chaos ensued, both political and personal, she chose not to discard the faith she had carefully developed, even in the face of certain death. It’s a tall order. Certainly requiring her A game.

We sometimes wonder what all the rigmarole is about. Why the fasting? Really, a hamburger just tastes so good, especially on Friday. What about all those services and checks on certain behaviors? And what’s the big deal about Sunday anyway? What do WE get out of all this? Until tested, it is sometimes difficult to see the use of it all. And then the test itself often seems troubling and unfair, leading us to ask, “why me?” Though it



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## BLESSINGS?

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is (thankfully) unlikely that we might be thrown down a mineshaft to a certain death, we are each day faced with decisions and dilemmas that test our courage and our resolve.

Just showing up, being available to God, is of tremendous worth. Prayer is always valuable, even when the mind needs to be lassoed back to the prayers every three seconds. It is through perseverance that our A game is built, the one that gives us resilience and strength. Every attempt at prayer is good, but don't give up too soon because it may be the millionth prayer, the billionth spin of the beads that opens our hearts. It is then, when we are present in His Presence, that we can find the ability to sing hymns in the mineshaft and to know that even those trials and misfortunes may in some mysterious way, be the choicest blessings.

In Him.

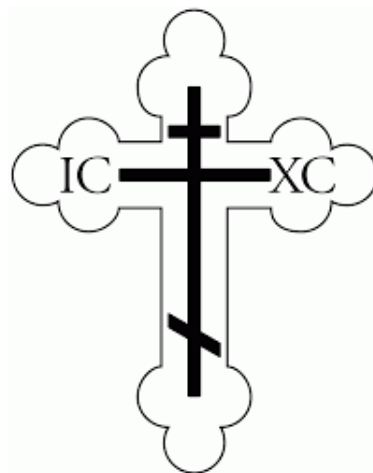
Matushka Alexandra Safchuk



Photo By Victor Lutes



Photo By Yiorgos Thalassis Blog





# FOCA GREEK NIGHT

*Photos by Victor Lutes*





## CONGRATULATIONS MICHAEL HYDOCK!

At the Diocesan Assembly in September, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, bestowed a *Gramota* upon Michael Hydock in gratitude and recognition for his many years as the Diocesan treasurer. May God Grant You Many Years Michael!!



*Photos Courtesy of Victor Lutes*

Many thanks!

## CHARITABLE PROJECTS AT ST. MARK

*Submitted by John Bilyeu, Sr.*

This holiday season our St. Mark parish had the privilege of participating in three charitable projects supporting the work of the **Community School Coordinator** at Highland Elementary School in Silver Spring, MD, through donations of grocery cards and Angel Tree gifts.



In October a series of emails directed at the SMOC Friends List solicited contributions for Thanksgiving grocery cards. Father Gregory and Sharon Carter aided the advertising effort by getting the word out during after-Liturgy announcements and in line items in the weekly bulletins, respectively. In just a few weekends, we had enough contributions to offer the coordinator \$50 worth of grocery cards for each of 30 families.

In mid-November the next campaign began, focusing jointly on Christmas grocery cards and the Angel Tree: this time we were given 31 families and their 42 children to support. As with the Thanksgiving collection, we committed initially to providing only \$25 in grocery cards for each

of these families, but we ended up, in the final analysis, donating \$50 per family. This was made possible by the generosity and timeliness of our parishioners' contributions.

For the Angel Tree project, the coordinator provided 42 cutouts (hung on the Angel Tree like ornaments), each representing one of the 42 children from the Highland Elementary School families. Each cutout contained the age (ranging from 2 months to 17 years old) and sex of a child, along with a detailed wish-list. Responding to email appeals on the SMOC Friends List, our parishioners eagerly signed up to sponsor the children over the course of two Sundays. The objective was to give our Orthodox Santa Clauses the opportunity to take advantage of the big sales over Thanksgiving week. All of the gifts were collected in time to deliver them to the coordinator well before Christmas. An additional four backup \$25 Target cards were donated, but since they were not needed for the Angel Tree project, they were given to Father Gregory for his discretionary use in meeting ongoing, charity-related requirements. As an added bonus, the Sedor family put together several bags of food from the church pantry to help stock the shelves at Highland Elementary School to further support families in need.



The **Community School Coordinator** at Highland Elementary School works for an organization called "Linkages to Learning," the mission of which involves

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## CHARITABLE PROJECTS AT ST. MARK

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supporting student learning, building strong families, and developing healthy communities. It is a social service, non-profit entity based in Montgomery County. Among the services offered are after-school programs, parent workshops, individual and family therapy, food drives, and clothing donations. Highland Elementary School is based in a zip code where there is significant poverty: up to 80% of the students qualify for free and reduced meals; many of their families struggle to make ends meet. Our church family should take pride in having made the holidays more special for the children and their families who benefited from donated grocery cards and Christmas gifts. Coordinating these projects on behalf of St. Mark provided some noteworthy take-aways:



1. St. Mark is a generous parish that responds enthusiastically and warmly to worthy, charity-related appeals.
2. Some sponsors exceeded the \$25 suggested limit, purchasing multiple gifts and delivering beautifully wrapped packages.
3. St. Mark families are happy to participate in charity work that focuses on needs outside of our parish.
4. Charitable projects such as these are valuable learning experience for our own children at St. Mark.

We now have an account set up with Giant Food that facilitates the purchase of grocery cards (minimum of \$500 at a time) to support charitable projects – and with a 5% discount.

Thanks very much to all parishioners who enthusiastically and generously supported these efforts this holiday season.

*Thank  
You*



# ST. MARK BAZAAR 2018

*Photos courtesy of Victor Lutes*





# ST. MARK BAZAAR 2018

*Photos courtesy of Victor Lutes*



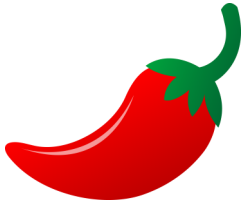


## FOCA NEWS & NOTES

*Submitted by: Marcella Hydock, Chapter President*

May you enjoy a Happy and Blessed New Year from the Saint Mark Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA).

**Officers for 2019:** Marcella Hydock, President. Paul Dean, Vice President. Michael Thompson, Treasurer. Barbara Freimann, Secretary. Congratulations!



**UPCOMING EVENT:** *Chili Cook Off! 2018*

Stay tuned for date and details!!

St. Mark Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) An official organization of the Orthodox Church in America.

What does St. Mark FOCA do?

We strive to raise funds for charitable causes and to support activities that reveal our Christian faith. Some of our recipients have been Bibles for Kenya, IOCC, and St. Mark Iconography Fund. Through fellowship sponsored social events we are able to maintain our scholarship fund and offer scholarships to students attending or about to attend college.



Our meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of the month following Vespers. It's time to think about renewing your membership or joining our chapter for 2019. Please ask for George Freimann or Marcella Hydock if you are interested or have questions regarding membership. We look forward to hearing from you.

## St. Mark FOCA Upcoming Meetings

**Mark your calendars!**

- **January 19th**
- **February 16th**
- **March 16th**



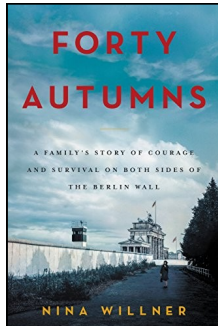


## UPCOMING EVENTS

### WOMENS BOOK GROUP

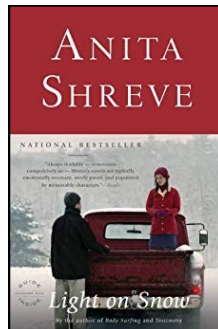
If you enjoy a good read followed by a worthy discussion, please consider attending the St. Mark Woman's Book Club. We choose books well in advance and then meet on the last Sunday of every month to discuss the merits of our choices. Book suggestions are always welcome. See Mka. Sasha or any participant for more details.

#### **January 27th**



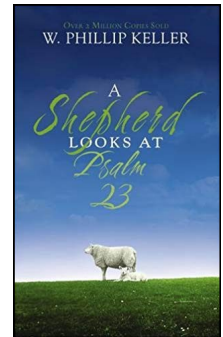
*Forty Autumns* by Nina Willner

#### **February 24th**



*Light on Snow* by Anita Shreve

#### **March 31st**



*A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23* by W. Philip Keller

### GROCERY CARDS

Please consider donating grocery cards for the needy for the summer and early fall. Please see Father Gregory, John Bilyeu for questions or donations. Thank you!

### STEPPING STONES MEAL DELIVERY

Please sign up for monthly food preparation and delivery to Stepping Stones shelter in Rockville, MD. The sign-up sheets are on the Outreach bulletin board outside the fellowship hall.

## UPDATE FROM DR. BILL

*From Dr. Bill's update email sent 12/18/18*

Dear praying friends and partners,

I was almost asleep when it started. A few tap tap taps on my neighbor's metal roof, joined by more and more percussionists until it was a deafening almighty deluge complete with light show and blasts of thunder. My room has big windows on three sides that are always open because this is equatorial Africa. My bed is under one of them, and when I felt wet splashing on my face, I found myself suddenly awake, unfastening the screens and pulling the windows closed. I discovered in the darkness that rain was blowing in the other two windows as well - how is that even possible? Which meant that all of the windows in the house needed closing. There were already puddles of water under several, but they all got closed and I got wet. Of course the power went out. But lightning every few seconds provided enough light to crawl back in bed, find a dry side to a pillow, and listen to the storm lashing all three sides of my room.

At this point, the neighbours cranked up their generator. So now I have a VERY LOUD generator, one that seems to be IN MY ROOM RIGHT HERE NEXT TO ME, competing with the storm to see who wins the prize for being the absolutely most annoying obstacle between me and a good night's sleep. Despite the stereophonic drama, I must have dozed off, because I didn't wake up until my rooster crowed at 4:30 AM. Actually I have two roosters (a problem that will be corrected at Christmas), and they both feel obligated to crow on alternative beats in the bar of music they are performing, especially their early morning concerts. 4:30 was actually ok because I get up at 5 AM to do crunches and pushups and then out the door at 5:30 for a 10-13 km run. I really like running very early, and for several reasons. First, it's not hot. Secondly, at any other time I would draw everybody's attention to me (white guy running on crowded streets), but in the pre-dawn darkness, most people are in bed asleep. I still get harassed from time to time, but those experiences just make me grateful that I'm not running in the later morning or evening when the streets are full of unemployed men who have nothing better to do than say something to the old white guy running by. The lovely thing about running when I do is that when I am on my last mile or so, I am running east and am regularly treated to some stunning sunrises. This is a good opportunity to remind myself, whatever I am processing internally, that yes, 'there is a God in Israel'.



And there has been a lot to process internally since last you heard from me.

I wrote a Nativity meditation earlier this month that you can access on my blog here:

(<http://onesimusredivivus.blogspot.com/2018/12/into-darkness.html>), so I won't trouble you with those thoughts here. Simply to say I have been feeling very temporal, like a wisp of smoke that is soon blown away, looking over what has been accomplished this past year and feeling very much like a stone

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## UPDATE FROM DR. BILL

*Continued from previous*

thrown into Lake Victoria - what difference can I possibly make, what impact can I possibly have? I have also been struggling with how quickly things can change. How the settled plans of one week can be completely overturned the next. How a seemingly secure calling and job description can simply disappear.

I came to western Kenya because my friend, Bishop Athanasius Akunda wanted me here. We share a common vision of what the challenges are in this vast diocese, and what needs to be done to begin to address them. My first months here have been spent trying some things, getting a sense of what might work and what definitely won't work. In the midst of all that, His Grace informed me that he wanted to ordain me, so that I could serve more effectively among my fellow clergy

After he was forced to postpone the first dates to do this in August, he had set Nativity Sunday, this Sunday, to ordain me as a deacon. His Grace had been traveling in the US when word got back that he was ill in hospital. Then came word that he was gravely ill, in the ICU and on life support. Because of HIPAA rules (laws governing access to patient information) there has been no information shared with anybody as to the whats and whys of his condition. So we know only the bare facts of his situation.. Please pray for His Grace. And for us back in his diocese. It's times like this when we are confronted with just how utterly dependent upon God we all are.



So suddenly everything is up in the air - certainly for His Grace - please pray for him. But also for me and everyone else in the diocese dependent upon his vision and leadership. None of us know how we are going to land. Will we be able to pick up and keep running in the same direction? Or not? I don't know. Obviously I am not going to be ordained on Sunday, maybe never. Again, please pray for HG, for me and for all of us here as we are having to navigate some very stormy waters.

There is some good news in the midst of all the uncertainty. I finished a draft of my book, *Rethinking Stewardship in Africa*. This required me to rewrite every chapter and to write from scratch three or four new ones over the past six months. So now my editor has all 13 chapters, and in the new year we will start making the final revisions, after which, hopefully, it will be published. This is a big deal, as every single church (and most Christians) over here struggles with money issues. I think I have something important to say.

I will be traveling to visit family (as my one chance to get away for the year) immediately following Christmas. In January I have been invited to present a paper at the big Orthodox theology conference in Iash, Romania. I have written a draft of my presentation on 'The Effects of Dependency in the Orthodox Churches of Western Kenya'. I'm hoping to get access to a proper research library once I'm in the States to get access to material I can't get here.

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## UPDATE FROM DR. BILL

*Continued from previous*

Our new Kisumu parish, St. Moses of Africa Orthodox Church, continues to slowly grow. This Saturday (12/22/2018), with the help of the Finnish Orthodox Charity, Filantropia, we will be providing a Christmas meal for the street boys we have been meeting with. Logistics are still very much in flux, so pray that these guys could have some good food to eat and have something positive to remember from this Christmas.

All of the things I am struggling with, or running up against, or challenged by, have as their source our common fall from knowing God and all the goodness that flows from Him. I live daily the reality of needing a Saviour. And the world in which I live may be cheering itself up by eating and drinking to excess, running from this party to the next, more and more lights and decorations, more presents and pleasures and distractions - but none of these things can fill the emptiness in their hearts and mine. We need a Saviour, one who will save us from our sin, who will save us from our futility, from our sickness and dying, who will undo what all of our wrong choices have unleashed, and make us instead what He created us to be. Which is why, when God chooses to act - when we open our eyes and arms and hearts to receive what is surely His awesome provision for me and you and for the salvation of the whole world - we are understandably startled when we find ourselves looking into the sleeping face of a newborn baby boy.

Blessed Nativity,

Bill





## BLESSED MAT. OLGA PRAYER GROUP

The Blessed Matushka Olga of Alaska Prayer Group meets regularly on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the month at 10:30 AM in the church nave for intercessory prayer. In addition, the group meets regularly to pray varying Akathists on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 10:30 AM in the church nave.

Please join us as you can and please remember us in your prayers. All prayer requests may be given to Debbi Dillon, Mat. Alexandra or Marcella Hydock. Also, there is a prayer request email address on the St. Mark website. We hope you can join us on:



### Intercessory Prayer Dates & Times:

- TUESDAY, JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5<sup>th</sup> 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, MARCH 5<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM

### Akathist Dates & Times:

- TUESDAY, JANUARY 15<sup>h</sup>, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, MARCH 19<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM

## Prayer to Matushka Olga

O blessed Matushka Olga, hear our prayer as we lift up our hearts to you, trusting in the power of your ceaseless intercession. Even as you spread the warmth of your maternal love over the souls of the needy, abused and broken, so warm our souls also, healing our pain and bringing us the love of Christ. Through your prayers, may we walk in the paths of peace, pleasing our Lord and glorifying His Name, and so finally fail not to enter into the joy of His eternal Kingdom, praising our God forever before His throne: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.



# UPDATER

Marilyn Macht  
1020 Mill Pond Road  
Apt F316  
Frederick, MD 21701  
Phone: 301-642-1308 (cell)

Sharon Sielinski & Herman Carter  
PO Box 4260  
Manassas, VA 20108  
Stay tuned: new email for Sharon  
to come!

## **Deaths**

11/02/18—Lucy Truitt, Don Truitt's Aunt  
11/10/18—Bill Dean, brother of Paul Dean  
11/29/18—Michael Ference, Father of Marcella Hydock  
12/16/18—John Paulsen, Grandfather of Mark Needham

*May Their Memory Be Eternal!*

## **New Baby!**

10/04/18—Amelia Marie Safchuk  
12/19/18—Olan Wang Sheppard

*May God Grant Them Many Years!*



## **Baptisms/Chrismations**

10/27/18—Herman Carter (Chrismated)  
12/01/18—Aden Robert Bryan (Baptized)  
12/09/18—Amelia Marie Safchuk (Baptized in California)  
12/22/18—Joshua Pierce (Chrismated)

*May God Grant Them Many Years!*

## **Marriages**

10/27/18—Christina Kuchta and James Nocera  
11/11/18—Sharon Sielinski and Herman Carter  
12/29/19—Peter Hamann and Anna Elkins

*May God Grant Them Many Years!*





# HAPPY BIRTHDAY!



## January

1 Jim Orban  
 2 James Flick  
 Robert Williams  
 4 Samuel Kumar  
 5 Michael Albert  
 Anna Meyendorff  
 Julia Shiller  
 7 John Bainbridge  
 Lisa Cannon  
 Ted Koopersmith  
 Pamela McHugh  
 8 Alexander Masick  
 9 Susan Petro  
 Debbie Sieff  
 11 Debbi Dillon  
 Anelia Rotunda  
 13 Elspeth Berry  
 Susan Orban  
 14 Joan Mitchum  
 15 Nicholas Bilyeu  
 Michael Bezuneh  
 16 Justin Ciubotaru  
 17 Hannah Perry  
 Janice Victorov  
 18 Katheryn Cannon  
 John C. Petro  
 19 Tom Cipu  
 Leroy Gumpert  
 20 Jacob LeFors  
 22 Slavina Skenderska  
 23 Eugenia Jankovic  
 24 Peter Dillon  
 Anthony Sekellick  
 25 Rose Zabela  
 26 Matthew Nimmer  
 Ivana Rotunda  
 27 Michael Berencz  
 James Lacko  
 28 Kaitlin Barber  
 Nicholas Herrara  
 29 Jurretta Heckscher  
 Marilyn Macht  
 30 Marti Badila  
 Michelle Corbin  
 31 Rodica Cipu



## February

1 William Koopersmith  
 2 Ann Groner  
 Olga Skenderska  
 Andrew Wickard  
 5 Gabriel Baleanu  
 Victoria Olynik  
 Fr. Gregory Safchuk  
 6 Anna Catherine Mersereau  
 7 Abigail Datch  
 8 Juliana Moser  
 Rosty Shiller  
 11 Marge German  
 Stefan Gleason  
 Tom Jenkins  
 Tamara Karas  
 Anna Kronick  
 12 Mihaela Vasilian  
 13 Jean Williams  
 14 Luke Matthew Tatusko  
 17 Nicholas Lapato  
 Clark Little  
 Chloe Nimmer  
 18 Peter McHugh  
 19 Nina Borissow  
 Mary Ann Fitzgerald  
 Donna Glenn  
 21 Roberta (Mitchum) McCunney  
 22 Nancy Stanton  
 24 Caleb German  
 Michael McCunney  
 25 John Bilyeu  
 Stacy Nimmer  
 Tabitha Voth  
 27 Isaiah Rodak  
 28 Marjorie Sielinski



## March

3 Mat. Tamara Cowan  
 Mark Kern  
 4 Gwyneth Berry  
 Samantha Sokich  
 6 Doug Dillon  
 Ryan Jefferson  
 7 Eileen Holovac  
 9 Selam Bezuneh  
 Stephen Morgan  
 10 Debra Yakubik  
 11 Cormac Allen  
 Jerry Lutes  
 Kyra Smerkanich  
 12 Arianna Cacic  
 Aaron Prose  
 13 Nadia Burns  
 Catherine Mikuluk  
 14 Beth Tucker  
 15 David Hardy  
 Sean McHugh  
 16 Patricia Ihnat  
 17 Matthew Looby  
 19 Catherine Corbin  
 20 Vera Bumbak  
 21 Sarah Arnold  
 Kieran Perdue  
 22 Dr. Dumitru Carstea  
 23 Daria Victorov  
 25 Michael Mihailov  
 26 Kellie Holovac  
 27 Alice Krenitsky  
 Theo Sheppard  
 29 Susan Sielinski  
 30 Michael Ahmadi  
 31 David Rodak  
 Rachel Sieff  
 Zachary Sieff

