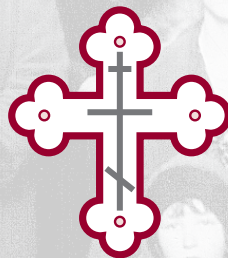


**SAINTS CONSTANTINE
AND ELENA
ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**



CELEBRATING MORE THAN 100 YEARS

THE FOUNDING OF SAINTS CONSTANTINE AND ELENA ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The history of Saints Constantine and Elena Romanian Orthodox Church is written in the hearts of the generations of faithful who have gathered to worship God together over the past one hundred years. In a certain sense, this history begins with an influx of Romanian immigrants to Indianapolis. According to The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, the first wave of Romanians to Indianapolis “found employment primarily in the automobile industry and the meat-processing factories... as cutters, trimmers, slaughterers, and packers.” One estimate by The Indianapolis News set the Romanian population in 1908 at 1,000. These first Romanians tended to live in two areas: an area between New York Street and Kentucky Avenue and West Street and the White River as well as Haughville (bounded by 10th Street, Belmont Avenue, Michigan and Vermont Streets, and Tibbs Avenue).

The history of our parish continues with the tireless work of the missionary priest Father Moise Balea. In December 1905, Fr. Moise travelled from Sibiu to Cleveland to found the first Romanian Orthodox Church in the United States. In 1906, he visited a number of Romanian communities in the US, including Indianapolis. Through these visits, he founded parishes in South Sharon, Pennsylvania; Youngstown, Ohio; and Indiana Harbor, Indiana. When he visited



The first church building at the intersection of Market and Blackford



Indianapolis, he organized a parish committee of interested Orthodox Christians and chose the name of Saints Constantine and Elena for the name of the proposed new church. Due to an economic depression and a lack of available priests, the establishment of the new congregation was postponed until 1910.

We can be grateful that the church that Fr. Moise planted in Indiana Harbor, Saint George’s Church, was able to install Father Simion Mihal-tian as their parish priest in June 1908. On June 12, 1910 Fr. Simion served the first Divine Liturgy for the Romanian faithful of Indianapolis. Five hundred attended services in a rented hall at 625 West Washington Street.

Following the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Simion praised the faithful, encouraged them to elect a parish council, and invited others to speak to this issue. Ioan Ursu (aka John Bear) arose to thank the faithful for their attendance. He said: “I have visited many American



cities where Romanians are settled but not as well established as in our city, but they have a greater love for their faith and their Church than we have here locally. Rev. Fr. Moise Balea founded several years ago (1906) a parish council committee, but because of the economic depression which followed, our city of Indianapolis was hit hard, and many from our brother members of the parish council left the city for good. In conclusion I ask all Romanian brothers to support Rev. Fr. Simion Mihal-tian’s proposition and help to elect a parish council.”

In response to these appeals, George Dordea arose to say that, “We Romanians have everything in this city, but we do not have a church.” He urged everyone to support the idea of building a church and donated \$25. Others in assembly came forward to pledge their support.

Hearing this, Ioan Ursu immediately took a piece of paper to note the pledges. In one hour, Ursu recorded pledges of \$700 toward the building fund. John Beu was elected president of the first parish council and Ioan Ursu as the first parish council secretary.

The next 12 months were quite eventful. The community was filled with sadness following the sudden death of Ioan Ursu on September 11, 1910. He was killed by an electric street car at the age of just 27. His wife died one week later in the hospital, leaving behind a six month old daughter. On the



Queen Marie

following day, September 12, the parish council purchased a building on the corner of West Market and Blackford Streets for \$5,300 and spent another \$2,700 on remodeling to conform to the floor plan of an Orthodox Church. On October 18, 1910 the parish council petitioned the Holy Consistory of Sibui to send a priest to serve the newly established parish. The priest's salary was set at \$70 a month plus \$200 for travel expenses from Romania.

In the absence of a Bishop but with authorization from Metropolitan Metianu of Romania, the Church was dedicated and consecrated on July 2, 1911 by Fathers Ilie Popa, Simion Mihaltian, and Octavian Petra. A historical marker on the Indianapolis canal walk marks this place today. The first priest to serve our community was Fr. Octavian Petra. In those early years, a number of priests served our parish: Octavian Muresan, Ilie Pop, Alexander Reu, Alexander Sirbu, Craciun Metea, Glicherie Popa, and Alexander Bogioca. On October 12, 1936, the Church was reconsecrated by His Grace, Bishop Polycarp Morusca, the first Romanian hierarch in America.

THE AMERICAN SETTLEMENT AND VISIT OF QUEEN MARIE

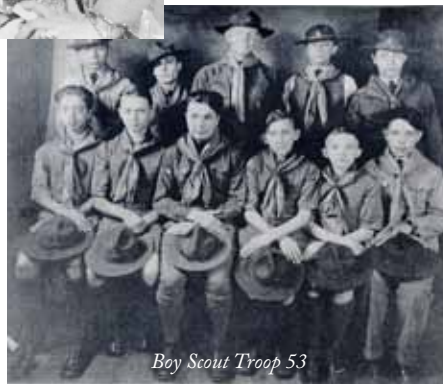
Another event of continuing importance in the life of our parish was the formation in 1911 of the American Settlement at 617 West Pearl Street. Located in a predominantly Romanian



Father Octavian Muresan and Preoteasa Soția

neighborhood, its primary purpose was to instruct foreign-born residents in English and citizenship, United States history and government, as well as the American way of life. Kingan & Company, a nearby meat packing plant that employed a number of immigrants, including Romanians, furnished the building for the American Settlement.

Mary Rigg served as its director and was one of the first professionally trained social workers in Indianapolis. Under the guidance of Mary Rigg, the American Settlement expanded its reach to the children of immigrants, encouraging them to pursue their education and become proud Americans. In 1921



Boy Scout Troop 53

Boy Scout Troop 53 was organized under the auspices of the settlement.

The highlight of the church's early history was the visit by Queen Marie of Romania on November 17, 1926. Romanian girls welcomed Queen Marie with flowers placed on the carpeted front walk and steps leading to the entrance to the church. Later in the day, the Queen and the Romanian royal family were honored by a downtown parade and a banquet at the Columbia Club. Because of its predominantly Romanian composition, Boy Scout Troop 53 had the distinction of being the honor guard during the parade. The Queen was accompanied by her daughter, Princess Ileana, who later became Mother Alexandra, founder of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. One of our priests, Father John Limbeson, is buried at this monastery.

In a newspaper article printed on February 10, 1930, the significance of the church and the American Settlement are highlighted. The article stated: "Both are important factors in the lives of the people around them. The church represents their native lands, the Community House their new adopted country." The article also depicted a familiar scene of church services: "The congregation stands during the entire service because, true to custom, there are no pews. However, there are stalls around the walls where one may sit, if one wishes. In the rear of the church is a choir loft, occupied by the choir of young voices. Near the pulpit there is a choir of older voices. The room is illuminated by candle light alone." In time, the American Settlement became known as the Mary Rigg Center. Our parish continues to provide regular contributions to the Mary Rigg Center in remembrance of the positive impact of Mary Rigg on the first Romanian immigrant families.



Father Paul and Preoteasa Elizabeth Craciun

THE NEW TEMPLE ON WEST 16TH STREET

Father Paul Craciun served the parish from 1940 to 1972. Preoteasa Craciun directed the Sunday School during most of these years. A note in the history of 1949 stated that Fr. Paul "is planning to bring the four Orthodox churches of Indianapolis together by organizing an Orthodox Association for mutual good will and understanding." It seems Fr. Paul had a vision for an inter-Orthodox Council in Indianapolis. This



Conceptual sketch by Fr. Paul

foresight has since been realized in Central Indiana, first as the Central Indiana Council of Orthodox Churches, and currently as the Presbyters Council of the Central Indiana Orthodox Christian Churches. Our parish has been fully involved in this expression of Orthodox unity from its inception.

As early as 1935, the Easy Bake Company expressed interest in the church property in order to expand the business. On April 27, 1947, the Company agreed to buy the site of the church on Blackford Street in exchange for the deed to five acres on West 16th Street, plus \$22,500 and the cost of dismantling the old church building, so that materials

could be reused to build the new church. Calling this "a golden opportunity," Fr. Paul blessed the work to build a new temple, which stands today at 3237 West 16th Street. Much of the work was done by the members themselves in order to keep costs down. Work began on March 1, 1948 and was completed in 1949. At that time, there was no head of the Episcopate, so



Archimandrite Teofil Ionescu blessed the new church on May 1, 1949. On October 12, 1952, His Grace Bishop Valerian consecrated the new Saints Constantine and Elena Romanian Orthodox Church. In May of 1971 the church built a parsonage for the parish priest. Other priests who served after Fr. Paul retired in 1972 were Fathers Gratian Radu, John Marmureanu, and Filimon Barbos.



Parish House ground breaking, 1971

CHALLENGE AND RENEWAL

In spite of many troubles during the 1970s through early 1990s, the parish's desire to serve God remained steadfast. Sylvia McRoy recounts how she stood in the back of the nave during a visit from Bishop Nathaniel. Considering the low attendance, she prayed "Lord, I don't want my church to close." One bright moment of promise during this time was noted in the minutes of the 1980 Parish Assembly by Eric Constant, then secretary of the Council: "Father John introduced John Schmidt, who has been attending our church faithfully for a number of months and has been assisting our choir in the congregational responses. John, a convert from Roman Catholicism, explained how he became interested in Orthodoxy... He said he was attracted to our church because of the lay people's participation in the Divine Liturgy." The Schmidt family represented the beginning of an influx of converts to the parish, and John went on to be ordained to the diaconate in 1990, serving the parish and the Episcopate faithfully for many years. God has been merciful to hear Sylvia's prayer along with all the prayers of the faithful.

Reflecting upon this difficult period upon the celebration of our church's 90th anniversary, Bishop Nathaniel wrote: "God, in His wisdom and according to His plan, allowed this community to undergo trials and tribulations. At more than one time, it may have been prepared to close its doors. However, because of the dedication and tenacity of some of the faithful, in particular of the women who were elected presidents of the Council, the parish resisted and is now at a level of balance and stability. It is to these and to those who regularly attended services that we



offer our blessings and our gratitude for their love and support of this parish. May God richly bless them and theirs."

Thus, a core of about a dozen first generation Romanian-Americans made a conscious decision

that their beloved church would continue to live and become home for anyone who sincerely wished to embrace the Orthodox faith. Dn. John continued to be an enthusiastic advocate for Orthodoxy in general, and the unique Romanian customs in particular, and other convert

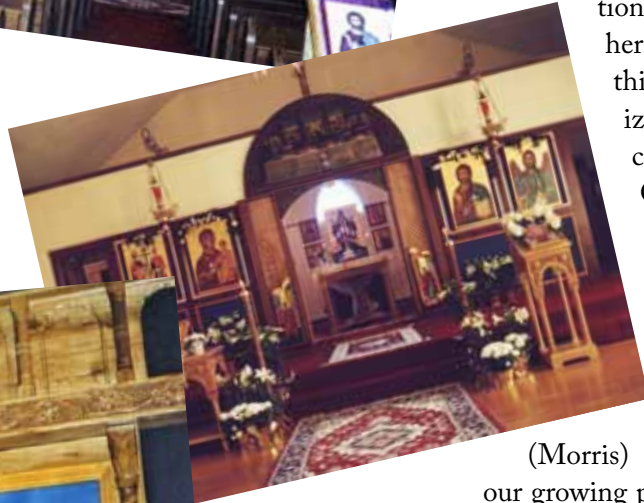
families began to find their way into the parish. During this period the worship language became primarily English. Vespers and Matins were offered weekly. Congregational singing and frequent reception of the sacraments were encouraged.

In the fall of 1993, Father John and P'sa. Betty Limbeson agreed to come to Indianapolis from

Yorba Linda, California to serve our parish. Fr. John was active in the Romanian Episcopate throughout his life: as an altar boy for Bishop Polycarp, as the first AROY president, and the first president of the Roma-

nian Orthodox Brotherhood. During Fr. John's service, Saints Constantine and Elena experienced a renewal: an increase in the number and variety of liturgical services held throughout the year, such as Presanctified Liturgies during Lent, a full Holy Week schedule, and the midnight Pascha





service; the baptism and chrismation of 35 new members; and the addition of other Orthodox Christians who have chosen to worship with us. The choir was reformed, and efforts to learn the complete spectrum of church melodies in the Eight Tones, according to the Byzantine tradition (and as received via the Romanian heritage), were undertaken. Alongside this sacramental and liturgical revitalization, church school and the local chapter of the American Romanian Orthodox Youth (AROY) were reestablished. The Indy AROY even won a national basketball championship with local Pan-Orthodox help.

In 1997 Fr. John retired and Heiromonk Father Joseph (Morris) came from Pennsylvania to serve our growing parish. Fr. Joseph noted five reasons to celebrate our church anniversaries:

- Because anniversaries and memorials were commanded in the Church of the Old Testament and continued in the Church of the New Testament.
- Anniversaries are for remembrance of the past, inspiration for our present struggle, and to identify the hope that points to the future Kingdom of God as the culmination of all human history.
- Anniversaries are times of homecoming and the strengthening of family and spiritual relations.
- Anniversaries are memorials of the past, are the foundations upon which we build our future, both by correcting past mistakes and affirming the solid accomplishments of faith that continue and endure to the present day.
- Anniversaries remind us "...unless the Lord build the house, in vain do we labor..."

Under Fr. Joseph's dedicated leadership and with the blessing of Archbishop Nathaniel, the life of the parish grew into a greater harmony with our rich Orthodox

heritage, both inwardly and outwardly: new icons were written; the temple was repainted in the traditional Byzantine style; a new Holy Table of white oak and granite was carved; and a new hand-carved oaken iconostasis by master-carver, Dorel Constantinescu of Iasi, Romania was installed. We also renovated our church hall, expanded our parking lot, and initiated an annual pre-Lenten lecture series.

In December of 2003 Deacon John Schmidt was ordained to the priesthood. He currently serves the parish of St. Elias in Ellwood City, PA, not far from the Transfiguration Monastery. In 2005 Deacon David Wey was also ordained as a priest. In 2006 Fr. Joseph was released to the Monastery of St. Gregory Palamas in Hayesville Ohio.



A LOOK BACK AND A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Of course, essentially the church is the people – the people of God, called to follow Jesus Christ in every generation, sharing their faith and the life in Christ with one another. Fr. John Limbeson, quoted in a November 29, 1997 Indianapolis Star article, speaks to this: “I think I have learned that we must make sure to use the gift of Christ’s salvation by living the Orthodox way of life, the liturgy and the sacraments. I will take that wherever I go, but I know that the people here have nourished that in me.”

In conclusion, we recognize the love and sweat put into founding the parish by faithful immigrants. We recognize that the church transcends mere ethnic roots. We recognize that during the difficult years there were faithful people that



Subdeacon Max Murphy leads our choir



kept the church alive. And as we give thanks for God's great mercy in providing a place for us to continue that growth, we recognize the gift and responsibility of continuing to build the church that we have been given. In the church's 90th anniversary booklet, Father David recalls a particular story that illustrates all of these points:

"There is a story in our recent past that, though simple and quiet in its occurrence, nonetheless stands in my imagination as a real watershed event in the life of our beloved parish. I am told that in early 1993, during a time of crisis and anxiety for the future of Ss. Constantine and Elena, several of the faithful gathered around the hospital bed of one of the oldest and most enduringly faithful members of the parish, Frank Fleser. As they discussed what seemed to them to be the imminent folding of the church, Frank said something simply practical and boldly profound – something along these lines: 'Let's take whatever money we've got, put it towards a decent salary for a good priest, and give it one more try for a couple of years. If it doesn't work out, we'll close the doors, knowing that we gave it our best shot.'

"Frank could not have known that, on the other side of the country, there was a priest and his wife who were summoning the courage to answer the request of the Bishop and the challenge of helping to rebuild a little parish in need. Neither could he have known that in that very same year, several former Protestants in Indianapolis were wrestling with the conviction that they must 'come home' to

the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the fullness of her sacramental communion.

"The faithful of the parish did step up to Frank's proposal; that priest and preteasa did make the sacrifice to move here to pastor the flock; and those seekers found, not only the fullness of the Faith once delivered to the saints, but the warm and welcoming embrace of a loving church community.

"By God's rich mercy, Ss. Constantine and Elena has continued to be a home for a diverse mix of people: those who have received and kept the heritage of the founders and previous generations as their own; those who recently immigrated to our nation and long for a place to stay connected to the ancient and living spiritual heritage of their homeland; and those from other faith experiences who seek that same spiritual inheritance, to be 'grafted' into the True Vine of Christ's Holy Church.

"Frank Fleser was one of the 'old timers' – yet he had a vision for the future of our parish. May his memory, and that of all our loved ones who have gone on before us to their rest, be eternal. And may we each and all carry that vision forward, as we faithfully seek to build a strong outpost of God's Kingdom in this place, a haven in which all who seek to know the Crucified and Risen Lord may find a welcome home.

"Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!"



the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the fullness of her sacramental communion.





We give thanks to God for the life of our parish, and together in Christ we look to the future. With heartfelt gratitude we are especially mindful of the many faithful people who established and maintained this community, through good times and times of hardship and trial; through their faith, love and perseverance, they have provided us a place to experience the kingdom of God.

Indeed, may their memory be eternal!

Roster of Parish Priests

- Father Octavian Petra † 1911
- Father Octavian Muresan † 1913-1914
- Father Ilie Pop † 1914-1916, 1918-1919
- Father Alexander Reu † 1916-1917
- Father Alexander Sirbu † 1919-1921
- Father Craciun Metea † 1921-1927
- Father Glicherie Popa † 1927-1934
- Father Alexander Bogioca † 1934-1940
- Father Paul Craciun † 1940-1972
- Father Gratian Radu † 1972-1979
- John Marmureanu 1979-1986
- Father Filimon Barbos 1987-1993
- Father John Limbeson † 1994-1997
- Hieromonk Joseph (Morris) 1997-2006
- Father David Wey 2006 – Present

†deceased





Saints Constantine and Elena Orthodox Church

3237 West 16th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46222

317.638.4162

www.saintsconstantineandelena.org