

A recollection

... from Larry Shaheen

These are a few of my recollections of my years as a member of the St. Philip family

While I was baptized in the Orthodox faith at birth, I rarely attended church because the services were in Arabic and the few Arabic words that I knew were never used in the Liturgy. So for many years I only attended Liturgy for weddings, funerals, and when my Grandfather was visiting.

Fast forward to the year 1982. Louise and I had a dinner date and while I was waiting for her I read the North Penn Reporter and saw the Antiochian Cross and the magic words, "Services in English." We decided to attend, but agreed that we did not want to be influenced by our feelings toward the Priest or parishioners only by our acceptance of the Doctrine. For several weeks we left immediately after the blessing, an action that was not unnoticed by Father Boniface.



The first two weeks gave us some pause. During the reading of the Gospel the first week I got very light-headed and thought I was going to faint, so I sat down. Julie Locke was across the aisle from me and immediately took me down stairs and gave me something to drink. She stayed until I was able to return to the service. When we arrived at the second time it was closed. It was conference time at the archdiocese and since Father Boniface was the only Priest, the church was closed so he could attend. After several more visits, we decided that St. Philip's was the right church for us, a decision that changed our lives.

The first time we stayed for coffee hour, Father Boniface found me before we left and I told him my story and said that I wanted to become a member of the church and practice the religion of my family. Father told me he had to take care of some details before this could be done; he then embraced me and told me that in the meantime I would be under the protection of the Holy Orthodox Church. Louise had come from a Protestant background, so this was even a bigger step for her. Unknown to me she was meeting with Father Boniface to prepare herself for becoming Orthodox.

As years passed I got to know that Father Boniface was gentle, soft spoken, humble, loving and firm in his beliefs and standards. It was rare that anything was done without Father Boniface's approval. He was our Spiritual Father and devoted many hours to the growing of St. Philip and for several years did so without accepting a salary.

At one council meeting a member announced that he and his wife were expecting a baby and would no longer be able to clean the church as their Stewardship commitment. Nothing more was said and after a few months I asked who was cleaning the church. Father Boniface smiled and said nothing. Obviously we did not want our Priest to be the church cleaner and the Cleaning Committee was born. I am sure he had been waiting for someone to step forward.

In 1987, Louise and I informed Father that we were going to get married. Father simply smiled but his son, Jonathan was there at the time and his comment was, "It's about time." I think Father's smile indicated the same thought.

It became evident that we were outgrowing our church and needed to build a new church if we were to continue our growth. Surprisingly we encountered some strong resistance to getting a building permit. The main objection seemed to be that they feared excessive partying and drinking. This went on for a while until one man said he didn't want his son to be exposed to this. By then Father Boniface had had enough and stood



up got close to the man, pointed his finger at him and said, "It would be good for your son to be in our church." That ended the discussion and eventually we got approval. Then the real action began. Most of us were disappointed with the architects. He designed what we could afford, not what we had in our dreams. Weeks, maybe months of meetings compromising and debating followed. Father Boniface was everywhere involved with most of the details. I thought it would never end. Then one day Terry Kaminsky came to me and said, "It is the people who make Saint Philip's what it is, not the building. Let's build the church." That feeling had spread to most of the Parish and the church got built, minus the

Great Room, which was accomplished with minimal difficulty. The cemetery is on land that had been owned by Father Boniface, who donated it to the church.

Many fund raising events were held - bake sales, garage sales, and others. While the amount of money raised was not substantial, they created a bond between many parishioners that still exists. Louise and I enjoyed these activities very much. Those of you who have worked together at our Food Festival know what I mean.

Years passed and St. Philip's church became a major part of our lives. Old friends would sometimes move away, but new friends would come. The parish grew and prospered. I think that Father Boniface felt that his goals for St. Philip had been realized and he wanted to do more. We had already sponsored one mission and he had other ideas for new missions. So Father Boniface began his work at St. Andrew's in Lewes, Delaware, and Father Noah became our priest, a different personality but with the same love and humility. So here we are some 34 years later, still very happy to be part of the St. Philip's family.

