

In the Lord's Vineyard: A Tribute to Catherine Lingas

Paul Lingas

Note: Catherine Lingas has been an exemplar of creativity and commitment to enhancing the missions and ministries of the Greek Orthodox Church, especially in the western United States. She retired a few years ago.

Born into and raised in the United Church of Canada, Catherine Lingas has led a remarkable life as a convert to the Orthodox Christian faith. She has raised four children, taught many years of Sunday school, and also worked tirelessly for a number of different mission and philanthropic organizations both within and in concert with the Orthodox Church.

Not long after being chrismated into the Orthodox faith at what was then Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church (now Cathedral) in Portland, Oregon, Catherine began volunteering in the church library, a library that, with her help, soon became Ethos

bookstore. As she tells it, "Less than half of the customers were our parishioners; some were people from other Orthodox backgrounds, and the rest were seekers drawn by the icons displayed in the window. Ethos provided a place to ask questions and to get information. During the 18 years that Ethos was open, the number of Orthodox churches in Portland went from three to thirteen." Catherine was the primary catalyst behind the expansion of the bookstore, setting up shop in a storefront across the street from the church. Catherine did the ordering, kept the books, made sure to promote the store, and was very often the one staffing what became a long-lasting, unique outlet of Orthodoxy for parishioners who needed to stock up on candles, icons, wicks, and prayer books, and for those interested in the Orthodox faith.

In 1980 the Diocese (now Metropolis) of San Francisco became involved in missions through the Philoptochos Board. In February of that year, Catherine became a member of the board, on which she served for twelve years before His Grace Metropolitan Anthony (of blessed memory) appointed her president of the newly established San Francisco Metropolis Commission for Orthodox Mission and Evangelism (COME). Its mission was to educate and engage the faithful, to foster parish growth, and to further



the work of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). During her time with COME, Catherine helped to start, monitor, and encourage over fourteen missions and small parishes in the seven western states.

In 1981, Catherine came up with the idea of having coin-collecting jars in each home, an idea she called “Pennies and Prayers.” The program’s goal was to increase mission consciousness among the faithful and to raise funds to aid overseas missions. While it came before her participation in—and indeed before the creation of—COME, the Pennies and Prayers program eventually became a joint program with the Mission Commission.

During this time, Catherine also served on the board of the OCMC from 1985 to 2004. She went on to serve as chair of the Archdiocesan Council Committee for Outreach and Evangelism of the Greek Archdiocese.

Catherine was involved with mission work for over twenty years, helping to plant and nurture Orthodox churches primarily in the seven western states, while also watching the growth of the Church overseas by serving on the board of the OCMC. While her exact duties varied by city, parish, and year, Catherine was often an on-the-ground liaison to those who wanted to form a mission parish. She traveled up and down the Pacific coast, meeting with clergy and laity and helping them to understand just what being a mission parish or a mission priest entailed. Her faith and hard work, as well as her loving and positive attitude, were integral to helping many of these communities understand what was necessary, both practically and in terms of faith and love in Christ, to create a mission church and have it grow into a full-fledged Orthodox parish. As

Catherine herself said, “In 2010, with the shortage of priests, we are unable to plant new parishes but are focusing on the growth of smaller parishes. We focus on helping the current parishioners to grow spiritually, become more committed, educated, and fully practicing Orthodox Christians. Ardent Orthodox Christians will attract others to the Orthodox faith.”

Catherine also served on the board of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and was a member of Church Women United and the National Council of Churches. As a member of EMO, she traveled with a group to the Holy Land, met with members of Congress, and helped to foster communication between parishes and organizations representing a variety of faiths.

Catherine was most recently involved in the Philoxenia (love of strangers) ministry at Holy Trinity. Begun in 2007, it involved a more concerted effort to have designated greeters in church every week to welcome people into the church. As Catherine wrote, “We never know what person, on what day, whether a frequent attendee or a stranger, will come into our midst and experience the presence and the power of God. That is why the mission of the Philoxenia ministry is not only to be a welcoming presence in the narthex and a helpful facilitator connecting people to Holy Trinity’s ministries. It is to be an example to every parishioner and ministry in our Church. All of us must be open and accepting of every person who comes through our doors, recognizing that all are made in the image of God, and all are called to be disciples.” In truth, these words perfectly sum up Catherine’s love and contributions to the Greek Orthodox Church and to the world as a whole. ✱

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