

Visit to Midland

by Milos Rastovic

MIDLAND, PA - During Serbian Orthodox Easter holiday, my wife and I visited St. George Serbian Orthodox Church in Midland, and attended Divine Liturgy led by Father Dejan Barac.

Driving from Pittsburgh to Midland, around 45 minutes, we saw abandoned factories and steel industry facilities, and a still active nuclear plant as well as a cracker plant, which is under construction. When you get to Midland, the first impression is that it is a small city founded on the work of laborers in the mining and steel industries. Our host was Fr. Dejan and Popadija Danijela Barac.

I was struck with the beautiful style of the St. George Serbian Orthodox Church which was built in 1949. The church was consecrated to the memory of the Holy Great-Martyr St. George under then-Bishop Dionisije. By Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic's suggestion, the church was named "Lazarica" to keep the memory of the original church Lazarica in Serbia.

In 1905, the first Serbian immigrants began coming to this area to search for a better life. They came from the Serbian areas of Lika, Kordun, Banja, Bosna, Slavonija, Srem, Banat, and Dalmatia. Among them were Rade Madjarevich, Nick Momcilovich, Nick Bobich, Mile Esapovich, and Milan Mislencevich. When they came, they worked exhaustive physical labor in the mines and steel mill. Many of them did not know the English language and came to stay for a while and returned home after saving money. However, many decided to stay, and they brought their families here. Since the Serbian community was growing, they had more needs to build a spiritual home.

On January 19, 1945, a decision was made for establishing the Church-School Congregation, purchasing the church site, and the Bishop's blessing was requested. The first church president was John Gypalo and parish administrator was Fr. Mladen Trbuhovich. Bishop Dionisije blessed the cornerstone of the church on October 12, 1947.

The marvelous iconostasis of the church was created by Roman Verhovskoy, a most distinguished Russian architect and artist of the twentieth century. The cost was \$11,000. Verhovskoy earned his degree in architecture at the Imperial Academy of Arts and was awarded many medals for his works, including the Certificate of Merit and the Silver Badge of the Academy. He worked as an architect of buildings of His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery and the Bokhara and Fergana Railway stations in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1913. After serving the army in World War I, he arrived in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1924 and stayed until 1937. While living in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, he created

several monuments and sculptures in Belgrade. The most famous works are the monuments to "Defenders of Belgrade in World War I" (1931), Russian to commemorate the fallen Russian soldiers in World War I Glory at the Belgrade New Cemetery (1935), and a monument "Hercules" fountain among others. In 1937, he immigrated to the United States, where he designed many churches, cathedrals, iconostases, and other church projects. He died in New York in 1968.

Father Milorad Dobrota, who came from the concentration camp in Eboli, Italy, was a priest in this church from 1947 until 1970. He made a significant contribution to the church by organizing many church activities such as Junior Choir, the St. George Tamburitzans, the Church School Classes, the Mother's club, and others. Other priests also gave their hallmarks to the church and the Serbian community, such as Iguman Simeon Grozdanic (1970), Rev. Milan Sturgis (1971 – 1988), V. Rev. Slobodan Prodanovich (1990), Rev. Zoran Milinkovich (1991 – 1994), Rev. Stephen Zarembo (1994 – 2003), Rev. Slavko Zorica (2003), Rev. Milan Pajic (2004 – 2012), V. Rev. Stavrophor Milan Krstic (2021 – 2014), and Rev. Branislav Golic (2014 – 2016) among others.

In 1936, the Dr. Laza Kostich Choir was established and later became the official choir of the St. George Serbian Orthodox Church. Today, the choir successfully performs during the Divine Liturgy, Serbian Singing Federation Festivals, and other occasions conducted by Popadija Danijela Barac.

In 1935, the American-Serbian Club was founded, which has been the greatest supporter of the church's activities throughout all of these decades. In 1930, the Circle of Serbian Sisters was established under the name Srpska Vila. They bought two church properties and the American-Yugoslav club by organizing social events such as dances, picnics, and banquets to raise money for their members and later for the church. After the Divine Liturgy, my wife and I were guests of the Barac family at the parish house. They served delicious Serbian food and drinks. It was a pleasure to be a guest there with wonderful people beneficial to our spiritual lives.

I would recommend everybody visit this marvelous church in Midland to appreciate the iconostasis and the people of the church community, praying for the good of all of us.

Author's note: In the article, information was used from the brochure "70th Anniversary St. George Serbian Orthodox Church 1949 – 2019." Photos by Popadija Danijela Barac



Family Barac with guests in the parish home during the Easter Holiday



Popadija Danijela, Mina, and Fr. Dejan Barac

