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GEORGE NICOLOFF

PAPERS, 1939-2000
(bulk dates, 1970-1991)
1.7 linear feet

Call Number: 05117 Aa 2

ACQUISITION: The records were donated to the library in 2005 by Mrs. Vera Nicoloff (Donor No. 8978).

ACCESS: The collection is open without restriction.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Photographs are located in Box 1.

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PROCESSED BY: Christie Peterson, September 2005

Abstract

George Nicoloff was an active priest in the Macedonian/Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the Detroit area from 1936 to 1991, and was a lifelong supporter of the movements for freedom and independence in Macedonia. His papers include his own sermons and religious writings, as well as records, papers and correspondence from St. Paul, the Dearborn Heights church where he served, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese of the United States and Canada.

Biography

George Nicoloff was born in 1906 in Sofia, Bulgaria. He entered seminary at the age of 13, and graduated 10 years later from the Theological Faculty of the University of Sofia. In 1930 he began doctoral studies in theology and philosophy at the University of Vienna. George Nicoloff and Vera Buneva were married in 1935. Shortly thereafter he was ordained to the priesthood and was selected to serve at St. Clement of Ohrid Macedono-Bulgarian Church of Detroit, where he first celebrated the liturgy in January 1936.

While in Bulgaria, Fr. Nicoloff was well-known for his active role in the Macedonian Freedom Movement. He wrote for several newspapers and translated the Gettysburg Address from German into Bulgarian, the language in which he had it published for the first time. After his immigration, he became a leader in the U.S.-based Macedonian Patriotic Organization.

For nearly a decade after his immigration, Fr. Nicoloff was the only Bulgarian Orthodox Priest in the United States. He provided religious ministrations throughout the Midwest during this time period, and is estimated to have baptized, married and buried thousands over the course of his career. Additionally, he served as a leader to the Macedonian/Bulgarian immigrant community, and helped many new immigrants establish their lives in this country. He was a frequent contributor to the *Macedonian Tribune* newspaper, as well as the *Voice of America* radio broadcasts.

In 1970, the parish where Fr. Nicoloff served was moved to Dearborn Heights, where it became St. Paul Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral. In 1971, Fr. Nicoloff was elevated to Protopresbyter, the highest level of married priest in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. He continued to serve actively at St. Paul until his retirement in 1991. Otets, as he was lovingly called by many, died in 1997 at the age of 90. In 2000, his family published a collection of remembrances of Fr. Nicoloff, a testament to the many lives he touched.

Please refer to the Special Edition of the *Macedonian Tribune* and the booklet *In Remembrance of Father George* in Box 1, which served as sources for this Biographical Note, for more detailed information on the life of Fr. Nicoloff.

Scope and Content Note

The George Nicoloff papers document the activities of a Macedonian/Bulgarian cultural and religious community in the late 20th-century United States. The papers are divided into three series: **Personal**, **Parish: St. Paul Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral**, and **Diocese: The Orthodox Church in America, Bulgarian Diocese in U.S.A. & Canada**.

The **Personal** series (.4 linear feet) contains biographical information about Fr. Nicoloff, a few photographs, early diaries and letters from church leaders, copies of religious items he wrote for the *Voice of America* and the *Macedonian Tribune* in the early 1980s, and several items published by the Macedonian Patriotic Organization of the U.S. and Canada. It also contains information Fr. Nicoloff collected on immigration regulations, various religious services and rites, and the histories of the Macedonian/Bulgarian church and people.

The **Parish** series (.7 linear feet) contains documents, records, newsletters and correspondence generated during the course of everyday Church business. Correspondence confirming baptisms and marriages is common. Most of the records date from the time period between the move to Dearborn Heights in 1970 and Fr. Nicoloff's retirement in 1991.

The **Diocese** series (.6 linear feet) contains documents, records and correspondence generated during the course of Fr. Nicoloff's work with the Bulgarian Diocese of the Orthodox Church in America. Many of the documents are related to the Diocesan annual conference, including Fr. Nicoloff's notes of the proceedings. This series also contains documents related to local Orthodox organizations.

Special Note on Language

Most of the correspondence and many of the other items in this collection are written in Bulgarian, and so could not be assessed for content at the time of processing. Correspondence was divided between the Parish and Diocese series according to how it was organized at the time of donation. Researchers capable of reading Bulgarian are strongly encouraged to review both series, rather than relying on this division. Additionally, a folder of several "miscellaneous" items in Bulgarian that could not readily be associated with either series is included at the end of the collection.

Box No. Description

Personal**Box 1**

Obituaries of Fr. Nicoloff and Booklet, *In Remembrance of Father George*, 1997 and 2000
 Photographs of Fr. Nicoloff taken for Detroit Free Press, 1980
 Photocopied photographs
 Mementos from 30th and 50th anniversaries, 1965 and 1985
 Memoirs of Efrosina Nicoloff (Fr. Nicoloff's mother)
 Memorial book for Fr. Vasil Mihailoff (1910-1981)
 Letters from Metropolitan Ambrosy and Metropolitan Sofrony, 1939 and 1940
 Diary, 1942
 Diary, 1943
 Diary, 1944
 "Voice of America" Sermons, January – June 1984
 "Voice of America" Sermons, July – December 1984 and February 1986
 Easter message published in *Macedonian Tribune*, 1983
 Parish, Church and ethnic histories
 Macedonian Patriotic Organization of the U.S. and Canada
 Information for immigrants
 Information on various religious rites and services

Parish: St. Paul Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral

Programs from ground breaking, consecration and dedication, and mortgage burning celebrations, 1969, 1971 and 1975
 By-laws, 1972, and photographic directory, c. 1995
 Newspaper clippings, 1971, 1980, 1986
 Dearborn – Dearborn Heights Inter-Faith Banquet, 1972 and 1973
 Sunday School, 1979 and 1984
 Mixed Bowling League Banquet, 1981
 Usher instructions and assignment list, undated
 Membership, Church Committee and other meetings, annual reports, 1970-1985
 Correspondence
 1965-1974
 1975-1978
 1979 (2 folders)
 1980 and 1981 2 folders)
 1982 and 1983 (2 folders)
 1984
 1985-1989
 1990-1991 and undated
 Newsletter
 April 1973, 1981-1984
 1985
 1987
 1988
 1989
 1990
 Fr. Nicoloff's sermons, 1971-1990 (photocopied from Newsletters)

Box No. Description

Parish: St. Paul Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Cathedral (cont.)

Box 2

Easter programs, 1972-1988 and undated
Holy week activity schedules and flyers, 1974-1988
Christmas programs and flyers, undated and 1981
Orders for candelos, cencer, bishop chair, etc., 1971 (spiral notebook)
Memorials for parish members (?) 1979, 1981, 1984

**Diocese: The Orthodox Church in America, Bulgarian Diocese in
U.S.A. & Canada**

Pamphlet: *Autocephaly, a door to the future*, undated
Archpastoral Christmas messages, 1966-1988
The Diocesan Messenger (Newsletter), 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983
Newspaper clippings, 1975, 1979, 1981, 1984
Programs, etc. from other churches
Meeting minutes and notes
1979-1983
1984-1990
Diocesan Conferences
1965, 1976
1978
1979
1980-1981
1982-1984
1985-1986
1987-1988
1989-1993
Clergy Retreats, 1979, 1982, 1983
Orthodox Church in America All American Council, 1980
Local Orthodox Organizations
Correspondence
1968-1980
1981-1983
1984-1991 and undated
Miscellaneous