

HOW DID IT START?



Assumptionists' Church in Moscow

On September 14, 1903, Fr. Baurain arrived in St. Petersburg where he established the first Assumptionist residence in Russia. This was the fulfillment of one of Fr. d'Alzon's most ambitious dreams. Two years later, Fr. Maniglier founded St. Peter's Church in Odessa and the dream became a reality. After the Bolshevik Revolution, most foreigners were expelled and very little remained of the Assumptionist presence except for the Church of St. Louis in Moscow. It is to this Church that Fr. Leopold Braun was attached as the first American Assumptionist to serve the diplomatic corps under the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreement. American Assumptionists served in Moscow for the next 75 years.

100 YEARS IN RUSSIA

Dear Friends,

From November 20-22, the Assumptionists sponsored a colloquium in Rome to commemorate the centenary of the Assumptionist presence in Russia. During the colloquium, Prof. Gary Hamburg of the History Department of Notre Dame University made a presentation on the experience of Fr. Leopold Braun, the first AA to serve as chaplain to the international community in Moscow, from 1934-45. It is a compelling and heroic story. Please read a complete copy of his [lecture](#) .

Fr. John Franck, aa

SHORT HISTORY

Founded in 1850, the Assumptionists have been engaged in a variety of distinguished global



Assumptionist Moscow Mission chaplains: Fr. Louis Dion, Fr. Philip Bonvouloir, Fr. Georges Bissonnette, Fr. Antonio Laberge, Fr. Eugene LaPlante, Fr. Louis Robert Brassard and Fr. Joseph Richard around 1978.

endeavors including projects in numerous parts of Eastern Europe and Russia. Between 1905 and World War I a few Assumptionists established themselves in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and Vilna. One of the best known of these early pioneers was Fr. Pius Neveu, who arrived in St. Petersburg in 1906 to become chaplain at the Good Shepherd Cancer Hospital and Orphanage. From there he moved to the Donetz mining region in the Ukraine and took up work in the town of Makeyevka a year later. Fr. Neveu managed to remain at his post throughout the tumultuous period leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, despite imprisonment and the threat of the firing squad. Even after the Bolsheviks assumed power, Fr. Neveu continued to hold services in the church of Makeyevka, despite the Communist threat to convert his church into a movie theatre. Because the Catholic Church in Russia was without a Bishop, Pope Pius XI decided that Fr. Neveu would assume that charge. He was secretly consecrated Bishop in Moscow in 1923, where he carried on his work until 1936, most of these years without an Assumptionist companion.

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The situation for Assumptionist missionaries in Russia was dramatically changed by President Franklin Roosevelt. After long negotiations with Mr. Litvinov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, President Roosevelt secured the right for an American clergyman to enter Russia as chaplain to the diplomatic colony (Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement, November 16, 1933). Fr. Leopold Braun, an Assumptionist, was the first to enter Moscow under the new agreement. He arrived there on March 1, 1934. Since the signing of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement, eleven Assumptionists have held this position. Deeply influenced by their contact with the Russian people, each of these in returning home has found ways to tell the story of his experience. Through public lectures, articles, books (1), teaching, etc., they have expanded their own understanding of Russia and sought to instruct others about this fascinating and mysterious country. Perhaps the most tangible sign of Assumptionist involvement in Russia is a substantial collection of original Russian icons. See more about Icons at: www.stannestpat.org/icons.htm

Assumptionists who have served the Church in Moscow:



Prof. Gary Hamburg with Moscow Mission chaplains: Norman Meiklejohn, Eugene LaPlante and Philip Bonvouloir.

Pius Neveu September 4, 1926 – July 31, 1936

Leopold Braun March 1, 1934 -- December 27, 1945

Antonio Laberge October 26, 1945 -- January 28, 1949

Jean de Matha Thomas May 23, 1947 -- September 1, 1950

Louis Robert Brassard January 20, 1950 -- February 13, 1953

Georges Bissonnette January 25, 1953 -- March 5, 1955

Louis Dion January 25, 1959 -- September 22, 1961

Joseph Richard August 25, 1961 -- September 26, 1965

Eugene LaPlante September 14, 1965 -- August 28, 1968

Louis Dion August 18, 1968 -- August 27, 1971

Joseph Richard September 2, 1971 -- April 4, 1976

Philip Bonvouloir April 1, 1976 -- July 1979

Eugene LaPlante July 1979 -- September 18, 1983

Robert Fortin September 12, 1983 -- March 14, 1986

Norman Meiklejohn March 3, 1986 -- June 1999

