

Orthodox Community in Italy Requests Reception into Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church.

From January 8th - 15th, 2009, His Grace Bishop Andrew paid a pastoral visit to the community of St. Michael the Archangel in Bagnoregio, Viterbo, Italy.

The Rector of the parish, Archpriest Ambrogio Ciotta, and his small community had addressed their petition for reception to the First-Hierarchy of the ROAC - Metropolitan Valentine of Suzdal and Vladimir. With the blessing of Vladyka Valentine, His Grace Bishop Andrew of Pavlovskoye, Vicar of the Diocese of Suzdal, departed from New York to Rome the day after Christmas.

Vladyka Andrew was met at the airport by Fr. Ambrogio and Matushka Giovanna. Bagnoregio, Viterbo, is located about 100 kilometers north of Rome. The population of the town is about 3,800 people. Their small house chapel in honor of St. Michael the Archangel was constructed through the efforts of Fr. Ambrogio, Matushka Giovanna and their assistant - Reader Maurizio in the former garage of their home at Via Fidanza 18.



Fr. Ambrogio is 48 years old. He was born on the island of Sicily. He graduated from the Police Academy and served for about 20 years in an anti-crime unit. After his retirement from the police force, he got a job working for the Italian Immigration Bureau.

In the year 2000 he graduated from a Theological University in Rome with a doctoral degree. After graduation, he was ordained to what the Catholics call the “lay diaconate.”

At about the age of 40, he converted to Orthodoxy and was baptized together with his wife and daughter in the monastery of St. Seraphim of Sarov in the city of Pistoia. This monastery belongs to the jurisdiction of the Synod in Resistance, or Cyprianites.

He was ordained to the priesthood in 2004 in Milan by Metropolitan Eulogios of the Milan Synod. After becoming aware of the ecumenism of this jurisdiction, Fr. Ambrogio, in his search for the Truth, began to look at jurisdictions not represented in Italy. He found the web site of Archbishop Gregory of Denver and Colorado (formerly of ROAC), and asked to be received by him into our Church. After he discovered that Archbishop Gregory had been excluded from our Synod, he submitted a petition to



be received directly under the omophorion of the First-Hierarchy of the ROAC - Metropolitan Valentine.



Bishop Andrew, Reader Maurizio and Matushka Giovanna.

On the 10th of January, Fr. Ambrogio was received into the ROAC by Bishop Andrew of Pavlovskoye.

The community of St. Michael the Archangel, that Fr. Ambrogio looks after, is not very large. It consists of about 10-15 people. What is amazing is that in this Roman Catholic country, where society at large has been formed by the attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church, there are still people who search after the Truth and find it in Orthodoxy. Their services are conducted according to the usages of

the Russian Orthodox Church, but, by necessity, in Italian.

On the 11th of January, after the Divine Liturgy, the parishioners showed Bishop Andrew several local points of interest that are of universal Christian historical importance.

On the 12th of January, Fr. Ambrogio and Reader Maurizio took Bishop Andrew to the church



of the Holy Martyress Christine* (III century), where there are catacombs dating from the early years of Christianity.



Then, Bishop Andrew was shown a 16th century church, which had been built by the Knights Templar containing a replica of the Lord's Tomb in Jerusalem. They also showed him the church of St. Hermes, who suffered for Christ in 132 A.D. St. Hermes had been a pagan and the prefect of Rome. After the Holy Pope Alexander had resurrected his son, Elias, St. Hermes believed in Christ together with his wife, his sister (St. Theodora), and many of his slaves, whom he freed on the day of Pascha. For refusing to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, St. Hermes was beheaded.

They also showed Bishop Andrew some other attractions of the area.



Relics of St. Christine under the altar.



*Wax figure of St. Hermes under the altar.
Here, once a year, his relics are put on display.*



Town of Capodimonte on the shores of Lake Bolsena



Papal residence in the city of Viterbo



On the shores of Lake Bolsena. In the background can be seen the small island where once stood the city of Tyr, place of St. Christine's martyrdom.

Bishop Andrew's visit passed in an atmosphere of warmth and brotherly love. Vladyka's numerous responses, thanks to his knowledge of Italian, served to strengthen the faithful in orthodoxy - the only faith which leads to salvation.

On January 15th, His Grace Bishop Andrew made his return to New York.

** St. Christine was martyred around the year 300 A.D., during the reign of Diocletian. Her feast is celebrated by the Church on July 24th.*