

Our Parish and the Globeville Community

For more than one hundred years, the life and destiny of Holy Transfiguration congregation and those of the Globeville neighborhood have been inextricably linked. In 1888 some Polish families settled near what was to become the Globe Smelter and, soon after, the Village of Globeville came into being. Shortly thereafter, groups of "Volga Germans" began to make a home in the region. When, in the following decade, immigrants arrived from the Carpathian and Balkan regions of Eastern Europe, it was to Globeville and the jobs that were available there that they were drawn.

By 1898, when the congregation of Transfiguration of Christ rented space from one of the German sects and began construction of its Temple, the three tiny towns of Globeville, Argo and Garden Place had merged together to form an incorporated town. This Town of Globeville had its own power plant, jail, police department and town council. By the early 20th Century, the city fathers of Globeville agreed to accept incorporation into the City and County of Denver, upon the promise that city services and amenities would be extended to the residents' former town.

Globeville, now a Denver neighborhood, became the home of new arrivals from Europe of almost every nationality. Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Poles, Volga Dutch, and Carpatho-Rus (also called Slavish, Ukrainian, Ugro-Rus, etc.) settled in clearly identifiable sections of

Globeville, centered around the Austrian and Polish Roman Catholic churches, the Orthodox Church and the German Reformed and Lutheran churches.

The neighborhood, the neighbors and their respective Churches prospered, for the most part, until the depression of 1929. Transfiguration had suffered an earlier trauma of its own, as a result of the Russian Revolution, which caused a cut off of mission money and resulted in the Church building being mortgaged and lost for a time to the "Living Church" sect.

When the Great Depression struck, many residents lost their jobs in the smelters, brick yards and slaughterhouses. Families had to pull their children out of school after sixth grade to supplement family income in low paying jobs. Summers: from the Sunday after Pascha to Halloween, was a time for wives and children to migrate to the far off town of Littleton where they would work contracted sugar beat fields.

World War II saw most of the adult men of Globeville either enlisting or drafted into their nation's service. From our Holy Transfiguration congregation alone, 35 men served while those wives and mothers who had begun to return to their homes after the worst of the depression now had to return to the factories and packing houses to support the effort and help feed their families.

By this time, Globeville had begun to exercise some political clout through the efforts of attorney Andrew Wysowatcky who, with a grade school education, had nevertheless managed to put himself through law school and had risen to the rank of Denver City and

County Administrator. However, after the war ended, even attorney Wysowatcky could not stop the ravages of mindless and willful destruction, which the Denver city fathers conspired to inflict upon the neighborhood.

In the late forties and earlier fifties, despite the petitions of 20,000 Denver residents, the Valley Highway I-25 and I-70 bisected and re-bisected the old neighborhood, destroying much of the best housing stock, forcing the relocation of many second and third generation Globeville families, and subsequently causing the loss of amenities, such as a pharmacy and grocery, which are necessary to the stability of a residential community.

By the end of the 1950s, most of the parishioners of Transfiguration Parish, both older families and those who had arrived in Denver as refugees from Europe in the aftermath of WWII, were living outside of the neighborhood. The ethnic makeup of the remaining neighborhood was rapidly shifting from homeowners of Northern and Eastern European origin to Hispanic renters.

Meanwhile, Denver began to rezone whole areas of Globeville from residential to commercial and even industrial use. The city bought up vacant and undeveloped property and allowed it to go to uncontrolled vegetation. City services such as street cleaning, zoning and codes enforcement and maintenance of sidewalks, streets and recreational facilities ground to a halt. Gradually, both Globeville residents and city officials came to believe that the neighborhood's days as a residential community were numbered.

On three separate occasions, during the Rectorates of Frs. George Benigsen, Paul Ziatyk and Andrew Harrison, plans were made to relocate the parish in either the western or southern suburbs. Property was actually purchased in south-central Denver, but the parish could never form a consensus to actually abandon their historic Temple. Meanwhile, both of the German churches ceased to function in Globeville.

During Fr. Paul Ziatyk's tenure, the parish played an important part in the "Model Cities" project, which brought some attention to the plight of Globeville and also provided a day care center for families.

In 1975, the city unveiled its "Alternative Proposal" for Globeville, which called for the demolition of the neighborhood and the development of an industrial park on the site. The people of Globeville succeeded in derailing this plan, but it would be more than a decade before they would be able to offer a plan of their own.

When Fr. Joseph and Matushka Paulette Hirsch arrived in Globeville in 1984, the church was on dead center. No one liked the mess which the church and its surrounding buildings and grounds had become, but no one wanted to spend money on property from which we planned to move. Fr. Joseph had told the Parish Council at the time of his initial interview that His Grace, Bishop Boris had allowed him a choice about the assignment and that he did not intend to accept the parish unless the people were willing to make a commitment to stay and "Bloom where God planted them."

The parish accepted this and upon the Hirsch's arrival, work began to clean up the property, fix up the Temple

and plan the construction of a new church hall. Neighbors, seeing the effort, started to imitate it by cleaning up their own property. "There wasn't much use in cleaning up when you all had the biggest mess in the neighborhood," was one neighbor's comment. As projects were carried out a flag pole re-strung, a flower pot mounted on a pedestal, a sign erected, a rectory cleaned, painted and remodeled, the yard cleaned, etc., a feeling of pride began to return to the parish which affected the neighborhood.

By the following summer, the parish was ready to demolish the old flood damaged one room school house which had served as a parish hall for 70 years, and to build a large, two story multi-purpose building to accommodate the developing needs of a now growing parish. In obtaining permission for certain construction features, it became necessary for the parish to obtain an agreement from the Globeville community group. This was the first contact which Matushka Paulette and Fr. Joseph were to have with the Globeville Civic Association, for although there remained about ten adult parish members living in Globeville, none of them were involved in the neighborhood organization.

The approval of the plans for the hall brought renewed attention from the city. "Why would anyone want to build a \$200,000 building in Globeville?", some people from the planning office asked. Within a few weeks of the beginning of construction of the new parish hall, a committee contacted Matuska Paulette, who had done much of the negotiation with the neighborhood group, to request that she accept election as President of the Globeville Civic Association. After hesitation, she agreed.

During the years of her presidency, 1986-1995, the neighborhood was confronted with several opportunities and a couple of potentially, life-threatening challenges. Organizing the neighborhood into quadrants and sub-dividing these into block captaincies, the neighborhood put together a community development grant proposal which secured \$180,000 for sidewalk construction and replacement. At last, the neighborhood would have the sidewalks promised at the time of annexation.

During the C. D. A. hearing, the neighborhood was told, "You won't be able to do this next year because you don't have a comprehensive neighborhood plan." When asked how a neighborhood gets a plan, they were told that no planner would be available in the foreseeable future. So, while everything else was underway, Matushka assembled a group of neighbors representing the variety of ages and ethnic extractions in the neighborhood, and the Civic Association set out to write its own plan. It took the city two weeks to get wind of this and, by the end of the process, the neighborhood not only had a comprehensive plan, but the City Planning Office had begun to copy the planning methods which Globeville had employed.

While planning was going on, the neighborhood was confronted with an attempt by the Colorado Dept. of Transportation to cut off its access to the very highways which had endangered it and which were the only means of access and egress for the community. Matushka fought the case from Washington D.C. down to the City Council level, and after a meeting which she arranged with over 600 business, and civic leaders, as

well as neighborhood residents, the Transportation Department began to back down. She ended up as a highly valued member of the planning group for redevelopment of the I-70 & I-25 interchange known as "The Mousetrap."

To replace a pedestrian tunnel under I-70 would have cost \$3,000,000. Matushka offered a bargain whereby impacts could be mitigated through the installation of old fashioned lighting fixtures along the main pedestrian corridors; C.D.O.T. not only installed the lamps but set up a perpetual trust to maintain them. And, since the ground was going to be torn up for the light cables, she and Councilwoman Deborah Ortega convinced Denver Public Service to use the same trenches to "underground" the power lines along those streets.

Caught between self-seeking environmental hired guns, the State Attorney General and State Health Department, the neighborhood was being pictured as a swamp of pollution. Elderly residents were told that their city drinking water was polluted with chemicals while, in fact, only a handful of irrigation wells were found to be problematic. Through clean-up negotiations and a landmark lawsuit, the Civic Association kept a cool head and has achieved results which other communities have been waiting decades to obtain. Matushka helped establish a landmark Medical Monitoring Board for the neighborhood to gather hard data and protect the health of residents.

In 1992, Matushka wrote two grant proposals which have had a long-term impact on the community. The first was through the Annie E. Casey Foundation for Children and Families at Risk. Through this startup

grant, the Urban Children's Mental Health Coalition was established in North Denver. The second grant was from the Colorado Trust, the only one up to that point which was not awarded to a governmental entity. Through the planning process which followed, the neighborhood is continuously able to secure further funding for such programs as youth recreation, a community school, and a community resource center which succeeds the food bank which Holy Transfiguration initiated in the 1980s.

In 1996, Matushka relinquished the presidency of the neighborhood but was constrained to accept the title of Vice President for zoning and environmental issues. Since that time, she has helped initiate a zoning lawsuit to protect the neighborhood from being over impacted with institutional facilities. This case was successfully argued before the Colorado Supreme Court, with the neighborhood having previously prevailed in the Court of Appeals.

She has also been involved with the City Prosecutor's office in projects connected with community policing and community and restorative justice for youths. She has served three terms on the Board of Laradon Hall, a local facility and the largest facility for the developmentally disabled in the state.

Some further projects which the church has helped to promote are: the Brother's Redevelopment Corporation neighborhood fix ups, which have provided free and low cost home improvements for residents of several neighborhood blocks, the South Platte River Redevelopment Project, which will take the neighborhood out of the 100- year flood plain and bring

the scenic river park system into the neighborhood; and the recent Denver Bond Proposal which, provides paving for all of the alleys in Globeville. Matushka was the city's chief witness before the state Resource Board, which approved the \$27,000,000 for the Platte project, and she served on the Bond Proposal Committee which issued the \$3,000,000 proposal to clean up and pave the filthy dirt alleys. All of the vacant lots in the neighborhood are presently being developed as single family dwellings and property values are up 500% over the last decade.

It seems like a long time ago that all of this started, and many more people now have a part in the neighborhood work. The Civic Association has grown from a tiny kaffeeklutch of elderly European Americans into a truly representative community group. It has traversed a desert of conflict, dissolved, and been reborn as the Globeville United Neighbors. No less than 20 organizations and agencies have launched or carried forth their projects from our parish hall, and our church is the practical heart of the neighborhood. Even the McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Safeway store which serve our community owe their existence to efforts which began on our property.

In a genuine way, the story of the last decade and a half of Transfiguration Cathedral in Globeville is the story of the Light of Christ's Presence, shining before all men. We, the Orthodox people, are that Presence and the choice we made in 1984 to "Blossom where God planted us" has produced much fruit in Christ for many.