



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Centennial Anniversary of Pilgrimage to Fort Ross celebrated in the United States



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In October 2025, hierarchs, clerics and parishioners of the Orthodox Church in America and the Moscow Patriarchate, including the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, gathered at Fort Ross to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the annual pilgrimage to that historic place. The celebrations were led by His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada.

The celebrations began on October 3, with a one-day conference entitled “The Story of Orthodoxy at Fort Ross – Then and Now” held at St. Seraphim Cathedral of the Orthodox Church in America in Santa Rosa, CA. The addresses delivered by the conference speakers focused, in particular, on the history of

the Russian fort and the Holy Trinity-St. Nicholas Chapel, the first annual pilgrimages to Fort Ross, the martyrdom of St. Peter the Aleut, who had been killed by the Spaniards for his refusal to renounce the Orthodox faith, and on the lives of the saints associated with Fort Ross, Alaska and the Aleutian Islands.

Some of the speakers shared stories about the present-day life of Fort Ross, for example, about the visit to Fort Ross of the great grandson of St Innocent of Moscow – Archimandrite Innokenty (Veniaminov), who had come to walk in the footsteps of his great-grandfather on a pilgrimage. Robin Joy Wellman, who had worked at Fort Ross for over 30 years, spoke, in particular, about the research that she had done over the course of her career at Fort Ross. In 2021, Robin Joy Wellman received the name Innokentia in baptism, which took place in St. Innocent's home village of Anga in Russia.

Dr S.G. Stupin, Director of the N.N. Muravyov-Amursky Museum in Irkutsk, delivered an online address on the St. Innocent of Moscow Cultural and Educational Center in Anga. As part of the conference, a documentary entitled "American Orthodoxy" by Robert John Hammond was also shown.

Metropolitan Maximilian of Irkutsk and Angarsk, who was among the speakers, focused in his address on the early years of St. Innocent's life in Siberia. He also pointed out that the saint's life journey served as an example of the Divine Providence evidently acting in human life.

In the evening of October 3, the All-Night Vigil was celebrated at Saints Peter and Paul Church in Santa Rosa.

On October 4, pilgrims gathered at Fort Ross. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated outdoors at the Chapel of the Holy Trinity and Saint Nicholas. This year's pilgrimage also coincided with the centennial of the repose of St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener of North America.

Concelebrating the Divine Liturgy with His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada were Metropolitan Nicholas of New York and Eastern America, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, Metropolitan Maximilian of Irkutsk and Angarsk (Moscow Patriarchate), Archbishop Kyrill of San Francisco and Western America (ROCOR), Archbishop Daniel of Chicago and the Midwest (OCA), Bishop Vasily of San Francisco and the West (OCA), Bishop Theodosius of Seattle (ROCOR), and Bishop James of Sonora (ROCOR). Among the concelebrants were also about 30 clergymen and deacons. Retired Archbishop Benjamin of San Francisco (OCA) was in attendance.

Four hundred pilgrims came to Fort Ross that day from across the United States to take part in the celebrations.

The liturgical prayers were read in English and Church Slavonic.

Following the Divine Liturgy, a procession of the cross was held to the cemetery on the historical grounds. There, the memorial service was celebrated for the departed of Fort Ross.

To conclude the celebrations, all those present were invited to a festal repast held on the grounds of the fort.

The Ross Colony, founded in 1812 by the Russian American Company based in Alaska, is the home to the first Orthodox church outside of Alaska in all of North America. The chapel at Fort Ross, known as Holy Trinity-St Nicholas Chapel, was built in 1822.

In 1836, Priest Ioann (Veniaminov), the future Saint Innocent the Metropolitan of Moscow, travelled 1100 miles from Alaska to visit Fort Ross, a part of his pastoral territory, and became one of the first Orthodox priests to serve the Divine Liturgy outside of Alaska.

After Fort Ross was sold in 1841, no other divine services were held there until a visit by St. Sebastian (Dabović) in 1897 and later, in 1905, by St. Tikhon, the future Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Back in 1905, the Russian Orthodox Church organized a pilgrimage to Fort Ross.

In 1906, the San Francisco Earthquake flattened the chapel. It took years to raise funds to rebuild it, and on July 4, 1925, a pilgrimage to Fort Ross took place, marking the beginning of this annual tradition. Since 1925, liturgical services have been held in the chapel every year except when a fire destroyed it in 1970. Then pilgrims held the services outside the chapel until it was rebuilt in 1972.

Citing **website of the Orthodox Church in America,**

Press Service of the Irkutsk Diocese,

website of the OCA Diocese of the Midwest,

and Orthochristian.com

