

August 7, 2019

Dear Committee Members,

This is in support of co-naming 81st Street and Ridge Boulevard to include Fr. Paul Schneirla and St. Mary's Church.

Virtually from the founding of St. Mary's in 1951 to his retirement as its pastor in 2002, Fr. Paul Schneirla had been indelibly associated with the church. His role as parish priest, while central to his life, hardly comprised the totality of his activities. A man of vaulting intellect and boundless energy, Fr. Paul taught Old Testament at St. Vladimir's Seminary, the leading Orthodox Christian Seminary in the United States, and wrote and lectured extensively on various aspects of the history and thought of the Orthodox Church. A founding member of the Orthodox Theological Society in America - the only organization that brings together Orthodox theologians and scholars in the United States - Fr. Paul served a distinguished term as the Society's president. He was appointed Executive Secretary and Ecumenical Officer of the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1951 and held these positions until his retirement. Fr. Paul was the first head of the Archdiocesan Christian Education Department and Dean of the Atlantic Deanery. His editorship of the archdiocesan journal, *The WORD Magazine*, lent it intellectual respectability. His counsel was sought after and highly valued by the two Metropolitans, Anthony and Philip, under whom he served.

He was a member of the organizing committee that drew up the constitution for The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA) - an organization which, for the first time, brought together regularly the Orthodox bishops in the United States. Fr. Paul served as SCOBA's General Secretary for ten years and served on its Study and Planning Commission. His influence within SCOBA had been profound.

Fr. Paul was one of American Orthodoxy's most intellectually acute voices in the ecumenical arena. He served as a member of the General Board of the National Council of Churches, and can lay claim to being a founding member of the Orthodox/Anglican and Orthodox/National Polish Catholic theological dialogues. More significantly, Fr. Paul was also one of the founding members of the Eastern Orthodox/Roman Catholic Theological Consultation of North America.

Conversation with Fr. Paul was never less than intellectually stimulating and entertaining; this, despite the fact that conversation with him was largely a matter of listening. He may have worn his learning lightly but it was immense. Few were the

subjects, mundane or sacred, that he had not pondered and could articulate with grace.

Fr. Paul's achievements were many but, in his view, all of them were subordinate to his role as pastor at St. Mary's. At the time of his retirement at the age of 86 and after 51 years at St Mary's, most of his congregation had known no other priest in their parish and his retirement seemed to upset the order of nature. Certainties in this life are few and his flock, most of them, like him, resident in Bay Ridge, had derived great comfort in knowing that Fr. Paul would be present, celebrating liturgy on Sundays and, when appropriate, baptizing their newborn, crowning in marriage their relatives and friends, contributing mightily to their mirth, consoling them in grief, and accompanying them on their last journey, at least part of the way.

Perhaps the last word should be given to Fr. Robert Stephanopoulos, Fr. Paul's longtime colleague and friend, who said to me soon after Fr. Paul's passing: "A mighty oak has fallen." Let us restore a semblance of that oak to 81st Street and Ridge Boulevard.

Sincerely yours,

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