

Church Holds Service After Century of Silence

By [Irina Titova](#)

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Congregation members singing during the Anglican carol service, the church's first since the 1917 Revolution. **Alexander Belenky**

ST. PETERSBURG — About 50 people gathered for a traditional Christmas carol service held by the Anglican Chaplaincy of St. Petersburg in the Anglican church at 56 Angliiskaya Naberezhnaya the night of Dec. 18.

It was the first time an Anglican Christmas service had taken place in the building in nearly 100 years.

The congregation included British people who live and work in St. Petersburg, including British Consul General in St. Petersburg Gareth Ward, as well as many Russians.

“It was very important to hold this service exactly in this church that once used to be the center of the British community for more than 200 years,” Ward said. “And it is very

important for the British community to have access to this church again.”

Alexandra Moore, a British student who has been studying Russian in the city for the last three months and who attended the carol service, said she really enjoyed it, “especially close to Christmas.”

“We’re already in a festive mood, and this service gave an outlet for our mood,” Moore said.

Mollie Arbuthnot, another British student, said that attending the service “felt like being at home.”

Adrian Terris, warden of the Anglican Church in St. Petersburg and a native Scot who came to the service with his family and children, said they had been working for many years to have an opportunity to hold events in the historic British church and were “happy” to finally enjoy it thanks to the St. Petersburg Conservatory, which owns the building and cooperated with them.

The church is in the main hall of one of the city’s historic buildings. Mosaics depicting biblical subjects decorate the walls of the hall, and the original signs are in English.

The English church, originally established in Moscow by the Russia Company, moved first to Arkhangelsk and then to St. Petersburg when it became the new capital in 1712, according to the Anglican Church in St. Petersburg’s website. From 1721 until 1917, the church was located in the building at 56 Angliiskaya Naberezhnaya, which had been purchased by the British community. In 1815, having fallen into disrepair, the church was remodeled by the architect Giacomo Quarenghi to accommodate the congregation of more than 2,500 people, creating a new columned facade on the embankment.

“The English church [was] the focal point of the British community’s life in pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg. ... Quarenghi’s church in St. Petersburg, like St. Andrew’s Church in Moscow, is a reminder of the importance of spiritual matters for the expatriate British, but the history of the English church in Russia goes back to at least the seventeenth century,” wrote Anthony Cross, the British author of the book “By the Banks of the Neva” published by Cambridge University Press in 1997.

Sixty years after the building was remodeled, when it again fell into disrepair, the church was remodeled in the Victorian style, with the main new features being a set of stained-glass windows and an organ built by Brindley and Foster in Sheffield, England, which was considered to be the finest in northern Europe. In 1917, the church was forced to relocate to Vyborg, then the second city in the newly independent Finland, and then, with the outbreak of World War II, to Helsinki.

During the Soviet period, there were occasional visits to Leningrad by the Helsinki Anglican Chaplain, but there was no regular congregation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Anglican celebration of the Eucharist in St. Petersburg took place on Nov. 7, 1993, with many members of the Helsinki Anglican chaplaincy present. Since then, regular Sunday services have been held and in the Swedish Lutheran church.

The city’s Anglican church aims to provide an Anglican community for residents of St.

Petersburg, international students and visitors to the city.

“We seek to support and care for each other and we offer an open welcome to those only here for a short time,” the church says on its website.

The St. Petersburg church is part of the Anglican Church’s Eastern Deanery within the Diocese in Europe. Its area dean, the Rev. Canon Dr. Simon Stephens, is chaplain of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church in Moscow.

“Our services are conducted according to the traditions of the Anglican–Episcopal Church, but we welcome everybody. Our congregation is international, multicultural and multidenominational,” the church says.

St. Petersburg’s branch of the English church does not have its own permanent chaplain; services are instead led by Anglican clergy on short-term visits from Britain or by local clergy from the Swedish and Finnish Lutheran churches.

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