

Rector's Report to the 2018 Annual Assembly
Priest Gregory Joyce
March 3, 2019

In the documents of the ancient Church we read how **a Christian community is defined as a worshipping Eucharistic community**. The Russian Orthodox Church's concept of Missions also uses this definition. I would suggest that this is a very good designation and one for which we should strive as a parish family. Through our spiritual struggle and God's Grace, a theological cooperation called synergy, we are to be transformed into the true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we add to this community effort true Christian Love then the new church and social/educational center we have been preparing to build will be in fact much too small for all those that will be attracted to our parish and our authentic Christian witness. Now that we have completed our parish cemetery and begun to bury our friends and loved ones on our beloved St. Vladimir's property, the next step in our plan towards the ultimate goal of our new church and social/education center should, God willing, take place this coming construction season: the building of our parish day school. Classes are slated to begin in the fall of 2020.

I would like to make this very clear from the outset: we are not moving towards a new church and educational space so that the same number of parishioners can have more space per person to stand in a spacious new building. Rather, **we are moving towards a new church to bring more – many more – people to the Orthodox faith**. May the merciful Lord grant that we continue to march forward as a parish family in 2019 and beyond with this goal in mind!

Let me be very clear what the vision is regarding the new church: to step by step, day by day, prayer by prayer, effort by effort, grow into our new church. We will not take a wild leap in that direction, but build towards it with God's help and our struggle. We will not take out huge construction loans, but raise the funds needed to build the church. We will not build a barn with a cupola plopped on top, but a beautiful yet affordable traditional Orthodox Christian temple for God's glory. The parish council and various subcommittees are working very hard on this project. We do not see this work, but it is happening every day. And we are getting closer and closer every day. Building parking lots and paving them was a logical step in this direction. The cemetery was a logical next step. The school is a logical further step. And so we will travel, with the Lord's help and blessing, on the path that slowly but surely leads us to the new church. Fund raising efforts are going well, but your continued prayers in this regard would be very helpful. As would remembering the parish in your will, or buying life insurance that will benefit the parish. Please contact me or any member of the parish council to discuss how you can help. Let us begin by remembering first and foremost that this is a SPIRITUAL QUESTION – without the Lord's blessing this will never happen. So let us approach this work prayerfully, lovingly, in a true Orthodox Christian manner. Let us work together, repent together, and forgive each other daily as we, hand in hand as a parish family, move towards a project that will bring many more people to the True Faith!

- Congratulations to all that **our average number of those communing at all Divine Liturgies in 2018 was 57.25%. The average number of people communing weekly increased by 14% - to 75 people**. This is wonderful – let us keep striving to improve this number! After years of struggling to break the 50% mark in this metric we blasted through that mark this year! Congratulations to all! Let us redouble our efforts to exceed 60% in 2019, preparing ourselves to worthily receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ even more often.
- **In 2018 the average number of people kissing the cross was essentially flat**. This is a function of the fact that we have essentially reached 100% capacity in our present facility. This is

true of the Divine Services, but also for our other ministries such as Church School. Thank God for that, but let us also leverage the reality of this full capacity to work that much harder towards our new parish church. It is nice that we are so “packed” into the church now. This nice closeness will wear off rather quickly though – we must move as quickly and as intentionally as possible as we can towards the new church – and that means we need to challenge ourselves to increase our giving to the building fund in order to be able to start this work as soon as possible.

- **In 2018 we served 139 Divine Liturgies at St. Vladimir’s parish, or one Liturgy every 2.6 days. This is a record number of Liturgies for our parish for the third year in a row!** It is very important that we serve the Divine Services for the glory of God and I thank sincerely everyone who made this possible: from those who served, to those who sang, to those who baked prosphora, to those who cleaned the church, and everyone who participated in the Divine Liturgies through their prayerful presence. May the Lord grant us the zeal to continue to serve the Divine Liturgy as often as possible for His glory and the spiritual health of our parish family!
- In 2018 we continued to serve one liturgical cycle of all-English Divine Services monthly. **This is an important missionary outreach** and to be honest I really enjoy the quiet, prayerful atmosphere these Liturgies afford our parish. And as mentioned above, it is important to serve the Liturgy as often as we can in our parish church! At these Divine Liturgies it is not uncommon for nearly everyone in the church to partake of the Holy Mysteries. **We are purposefully a diverse community: ethnically, nationally, linguistically, and otherwise. Diversity is a HUGE strength of St. Vladimir's and something we need to continue to strive to inculcate.** Yes – occasionally we have a bit of angst that surrounds this diversity. That is normal, and spiritually I would argue that this is even beneficial. If we are never struggling in our faith – if we have no spiritual challenges – we regress. The Lord sends us the appropriate challenges at the appropriate time since He knows what we need for our salvation much better than we do. We intend to continue this ministry into the future and to continue to reach out to those around us – that we might not keep this “pearl of great price” which we have found for ourselves, but that might share it with as many others as we can. Please support us by inviting friends, loved ones, neighbors to these Divine Services and any/all of our other Divine Services and activities.
- We hope, with God’s help, to establish a special needs ministry in our parish in the coming year. Perhaps this will include a monthly Liturgy for those families seeking God, but struggling with a special needs child or adult child in their family.
- **In general we may say that the positive trend in our parish continues:** attendance is strong, the number of communicants is strong, the percentage of those communing is up, membership is strong and stable, and we had the largest number of members in the diocese last year. Likely we will have the largest number this year as well. This is all very exciting, but at the same time potentially dangerous in that it could lead us to complacency. **Christianity is a religion of mission and growth.** This has been the case from the time of the Apostles and must always remain so. **Let us redouble our efforts to spread the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not heard it** – not for the sake of being proud that our parish is growing, but so that we may give a good answer to the Lord when our time comes to do this – that we did our utmost to increase His flock.
- **We want your feedback!** We have placed a Google doc on our home page that allows you to provide feedback anonymously. You can also email us. You can leave us a note on Facebook. You can even talk to us! Please share your thoughts with us – we know you have a lot of value that you can add to your parish family. Please share!
- I would like to thank our Membership Coordinators: Vasiliy Krivtsov, Dmitri Knysh, and Konstantin Poplavksy for their diligent work! Membership is important, and we urge all who are eligible to become members. **This is important to our parish because it is important to our local governments and to our diocese.** This also puts us in a leadership position in our diocese and I

feel that this is a good thing in that it does not allow us to rest – we need to keep working hard to bring more people to the faith, which is exactly the charge our Lord gave us when He instructed us in the Great Commission (referenced above). May we continue this work for which we have been blessed by God Himself! **Fr. Paul Karas, our former Rector, always said that as a parish we have to either go forward or fall back – we cannot hold ourselves in place without regressing.** I could not agree more!

- Thank you to all who made **our most important missionary effort – our Russian Festival – a huge success** this year! Every year new people join our parish family because of the festival, many people are exposed to Orthodox Christianity and Russian culture in a positive way, and we shine as a parish family! Is this a difficult effort? YES! BUT we know how to do this now and how to do it well. We need more help – we need you! Don Skalitzky and Jack Mitchell are heading up the festival committee again this year. The committee is already meeting. Join us to help make this year's festival a success!
- We were privileged to have **Fr. Moses McPherson** continue to serve as the Assistant Rector of our parish. Fr. Moses and Matushka Ruth have become an integral part of our parish family. Thank God for sending Fr. Moses to us! He has been a huge help to me as the Rector and a huge help to our parish family as a whole. Thank you Fr. Moses for your sincere service and to your family who share you with us: Matushka Ruth, Isidore, John, and Joseph. May the Lord reward you all in this life and the next for your service to the Holy Church!
- I would like to thank Deacon Vladimir Pyrozhenko for his service to our parish family. Again this year Fr. Vladimir led us in prayer as our senior parish Deacon and we are very thankful for his ministry! We also must thank here his family: his wife Alexandra and children Daria, Anthony, Anna, Alexander, and Seraphima for generously sharing their husband and father with our parish family as he leads us in prayer fulfilling his obedience as a Deacon. May the Lord reward them all in this life and the next for their service to the Holy Church!
- This year Deacon Dmitriy Kashchenko was ordained as a second deacon for our parish. It is already impossible to understand how we ever existed with only one deacon before Fr. Dmitriy! We are thankful for Fr. Dmitriy's efforts. He is a great help to the entire parish family! Many thanks also to his wife Elena for generously sharing her husband with our parish so that he can exercise his ministry! May the Lord reward Fr. Dmitriy and Elena for their service to the Holy Church!
- **WE NEED MORE CLERGYMEN!** This means you. Men. All of you. If you are canonically eligible to be ordained you should be seriously considering this opportunity for service to our community. If you are not sure if you are eligible please see me!
- I would like to take this opportunity to **urge everyone to prepare as much as possible for their transition to the next life** – whether the actuarial tables make the likelihood of that transition soon or far from now. Most importantly we should prepare spiritually by living a Christian life to the best of our ability. Secondly, **for the sake of our family and their peace of mind we should arrange our affairs so that our wishes will be known through our wills or even better: through a will AND trust.** Please contact me to learn more about this. The Holy Church guides us in this regard – there are practices we follow and those that we do not. It is especially important for those without Orthodox relatives to prepare appropriately so that your wishes are followed after your repose. I am happy to help in this way however I can – but the key is to prepare now so that all flows smoothly when the time comes. In this regard, **we are happy to announce that we can offer space in our parish cemetery and that we have already begun to bury the faithful in this beautiful and peaceful place.** Graves are presently available for purchase, and many people have purchased burial rights already. This will be an important part of planning your final affairs and we encourage all to arrange for burial in the future parish cemetery. In this regard please note: having a parish cemetery means that it will be important for us to serve the Divine Liturgy as often as possible to commemorate the departed resting in the cemetery and our other

parish departed. **We hope in the future, once we have moved into our new church, that we would even be able to serve the Divine Liturgy daily and Archbishop Peter has blessed us to strive towards this goal.** But this means we would need adequate clergy and singers to do so, which will mean more resources from the parish. Ideally income from the cemetery and the growth in our parish will cover all this, but I want to share this with the parish now so that everyone understands the vision of the future in this regard.

- Our Choir, Readers, Church School, Youth Group, Greeters, Sisterhood, and Brotherhood continue to provide great value to our parishioners through their service to our community. **Thank you to all who head and participate in these important efforts:** Julia Easson, Ken Doll, Alexandra Pyrozhenko, Ksenia Nikulshina, Konstantin Poplavsky, Zhanna Skalitzky, and all our Youth Group volunteers. **Thank you also to all those who volunteer for the parish in other ways as well. You are too numerous to name, but may God bless you for your work for His Church!**
- I want to thank Deacon Dmitriy Kashchenko, our web master. We have a wonderful web site and this is the most important way that we reach those outside the parish. In other words, this is an important ministry and we should see it as such.
- Thank you to Dmitry Knysh who has led the pilgrimage efforts in our parish for several years. Pilgrimages to monasteries are an important part of our spiritual lives and Dmitriy's efforts make it possible for our parishioners to go on pilgrimage to Holy Trinity Monastery, Holy Cross Monastery, and other important spiritual centers of the Orthodox Church in North America.
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank Subdeacon John Zroika, our Head Altar Server, and all **those who serve in the altar** for their service. They add greatly to the service and make it possible for the parish clergy to pray in the altar without distraction, which is their principle ministry. Thank you all!
- I would also like to thank Albina Serafimovna Poplavskaya for her diligent work heading up our **parish kiosk**. The income from the kiosk is very helpful, to be sure, but even more so is the valuable ministry of greeting those visiting the parish that our kiosk provides. Thank you Albina!
- This year we again held a **Vacation Bible School** and it was again a great success! Our VBS has been centered on the commemoration of the Royal Martyrs over the last year and this will be the case this year as well. Thank you to all who worked so hard on this project in 2018 and all who will do so in 2019!
- I would like to thank those that take pictures of Divine Services and other St. Vladimir's activities for our **on-line photo album**. This is a very important ministry of our parish. **BUT WE NEED MORE HELP!** We need more people to volunteer to take pictures and especially we need one or two people to take regular videos of services and activities. Please consider if you might be able to fulfill this duty for the good of your fellow parishioners and especially for the good of those who are seeking a church home.
- In place of keeping the parish church open at all times we have installed an icon outside at which those who would like to pray can do so, even if the church is closed. We have also installed a Sky Bell front door system, which will allow anyone, anytime, to reach one of our priests if they come to a closed parish church and need spiritual help.
- As most of our parishioners are aware, I have several responsibilities in addition to being our parish Rector. I am the Dean of the Michigan Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, the Dean of our Diocesan Seminary, and the Secretary of the the Diocesan Council. All these things are getting done, but with some help they could be done much better than they are. I could use help with these duties this year – please contact me if you can help. In this regard I too want to say thank you. Sometimes I am not around when you need me to be because of these other duties. That is rare, but still happens sometimes. I appreciate everyone's understanding in this regard and ask your prayers!

- Last, but certainly not least I want to thank our outstanding **Parish Council** and especially Jack Mitchell for his work as Starosta of our parish. Frankly, we have a great team and I am very appreciative of their hard work in leading our parish! Please take a moment to thank our Parish Council for their sincere work for the good of our community the next time you have an opportunity to do so.
- People often have many good things to say about our parish, but the praise should not go to the priest. Rather, it should go to the team – all those I have mentioned here yes – but really to the whole parish. A parish cannot be a vibrant community without the willing and zealous participation of the members of the parish in the spiritual and social activities of the parish family. **You all make this a wonderful, unique, loving, active place and I thank you sincerely for your efforts to make our community one that is reflective of God's love!**

Elizabeth and I continue to consider it a privilege to serve this community. We thank you for your spiritual, moral, and financial support and we look forward to another wonderful year at St. Vladimir's!

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Baptisms/Chrismations	14	19	24	17	18	13	14	16	10	17	18	16	9	16	12
Marriages	2	6	5	5	5	2	4	1	4	3	1	2	1	0	0
Funerals	1	2	4	3	3	0	4	4	1	3	6	1	1	4	1
Average Kissing Cross Weekly	71	71	66	73	74	91	91	95	101	117	135	130	136	134	131
Average Communing Weekly	22	23	19	20	24	32	36	41	48	56	61	67	66	66	75
Percent Communing	30.99%	32.39%	28.79%	27.40%	32.43%	35.16%	39.56%	43.16%	47.52%	47.74%	44.95%	51.54%	48.53%	49.25%	57.25%
Number of Divine Liturgies				87	94	81	90	93	94	100	122	115	126	130	139
Liturgy Every X Days (Lower is more frequent)				4.20	3.88	4.51	4.06	3.92	3.88	3.65	2.99	3.17	2.90	2.81	2.63
Membership	44	47	46	59	71	86	95	110	111	129	129	138	156	150	154