

Starosta's Report to the 2025 Annual Assembly

Brendan Hayden

February 15, 2026

It's been a honor to serve the Church and the St. Vladimir parish community as your new parish warden for the last year. Jack Mitchell retired last February, after many years of loyal dedication to the parish.

If you read the actual text of the duties of a Starosta in the Orthodox Church, what it includes is basically...everything. Everything not handled by the clergy and priests. I swore on the Holy Scriptures that I would, to the very best of my ability, keep the church and all buildings and acreage maintained, keep finances in order, oil lamps and candle stands tended, vestments mended, maintain order in divine services, serve on the parish council, and much more. As I slowly learn the ins and outs of parish management in this particular parish and the intricacies of tending to our humble church, down to the fine details, you and I can rest assured that there are many *actually* brilliant and sober minded people already performing many of these duties, who have honed their skill over many years to contribute to the continued survival and success of our parish community. I'm fairly certainly needed here, and I'm eager to utilize my strengths for the benefit of the parish, but I'm happy in many cases to simply be available to support the people already lovingly tending their corner of the parish duties. It's been enlivening to join the discussions at the parish council, and offer my professional experience with building and development to help guide the future of our parish property, as well as to identify key capital improvements and critical maintenance needs.

In 2025 the parish council focused our attention on some overdue maintenance needs of our current church building, in order that in '26 we will be able to move on, with single-minded focus, to new construction of much needed larger buildings for our church and fellowship hall/kitchen. When it rained, water was coming in the roof, and coming up from the floor at the same time. Our catechist Fr. Colin switched gears one rainy night to teach a lesson about the Great Flood, and our catechumens stayed late to bail water from the church building. After this, we:

- Repaired block foundation walls to prevent flooding (volunteer labor)
- Installed aluminum fascia trim at the eaves of the church (volunteer labor)
- Replaced the roof shingles and rotten fascia boards (RD Kleinschmidt, Inc)
- New oversized gutters
- Work on underground stormwater pipes

In another exciting development in 2025, we tackled the restoration of the cupolas that first went up 20 years ago. Trinkle Crane helped us pluck the domes off the roof and we got the large one into the workshop to be restored with silver leaf. The smaller cupola will be completely rebuilt.

Last season was another stellar showing from our lawn mowing team, who kept the property looking tidy with their weekly effort and sacrifice. A small group of sisters work hard to maintain our gardens. Snow removal volunteers have braved a bitterly cold winter to keep our lots and walkways clear.

We at St. Vladimir parish are blessed in many ways, not the least with our sisterhood who toil quietly and diligently so we can enjoy something very rare in modern America- regular communal meals, with our parish family. I don't think we can underestimate the value of this. Please remember to thank a sister now and then. Or, better yet, ask how you can help.

It is obvious that our parish is blessed beyond measure with tremendously hard working clergy, and choir directors and members. We probably have more opportunities to attend divine services than almost any Orthodox Church in North America. This requires the efforts of many people, including our truly tireless Rector. It is something that benefits us all, and also something we as a parish can really be proud of (proud, “for lack of a better word” as Fr. Gregory might say).

The Russian Festival was a strong success. We raised 50K+ and had a good time doing it. Chairman Bill Edwards has made a master plan that will be invaluable for future festival planning and operation.

Our little parish school now occupies our newly completed school building five days a week, and is actively planning for the future needs of our parish as well as the broader Orthodox community locally.

Our young head brother has inspired many of the younger men to get involved and help with brotherhood duties, and this is a very good development that we need to continue to push.

Volunteers, too many to mention, work almost daily on our behalf, doing tasks from county water testing to planning fundraisers, cleaning the school, repairing equipment, serving on various committees, beautifully decorating our church and hall, teaching dancers, setting up before and cleaning up after meals, teaching the children music, running the church school, caring for the graveyard, the list goes on and on. A worshiping Eucharistic community, yes, but St. Vladimir parish is not merely a place only to come on a Sunday morning, but more and more it is a place to belong to, where we can raise our children, live much of our social lives, engage with the traditions of our people that go back centuries. There is something to engage with on almost any given day. Our parish community is a true and vibrant alternative to mainstream modern secular culture, or, as Fr. Thomas Hopko called it: The Pigpen.

The Old Testament Jews were quite unique of all the peoples of the Earth, in that they not only chronicled in great detail their great victories, but also their ignominious defeats and scandals. I think we can learn something here, and not pussyfoot around when recording the history of our parish. Our tithing/giving efforts, as a community, have been rather abysmal in comparison to what is properly ordered for a Christian community, and in comparison to what would be needed for the community to truly thrive and grow. Our participation in monthly volunteer work days was catastrophically low, to the point that after only one adult male parish member outside of parish leadership showed up in August, I lobbied to put the monthly “all-parish” work day out of its misery and try some different approaches to volunteer engagement. I’m eager to hear your feedback about what might motivate you to come and physically work to take care of your parish property. We particularly need our young men, boys and teenagers to be engaged in these efforts. We simply can’t afford to hire maintenance personnel for our large property and multiple buildings. Working hard with our fellow men is one of the great joys of life, and I sincerely pray that we can find a way to organize this and motivate each other. I truly believe that we need to maintain our church FIRST, using our precious free time, and THEN our own homes. Even if it means our wives yell at us. It seems to me that our ‘home churches’ orbit our parish church -from her the grace of God flows outward from the altar. Frankly, it is a disgrace when our church is in a shabbier state than our own homes. If we mobilize together, our 100+ parish members can make very quick work of taking care of our church property and then we can use our other Saturdays to work on our own homes and gardens with a good conscience. Or, alternately, if enough of us become stable and solid as Christians and mature into tithing, then we can simply hire a maintenance company. We have options. Either way, the good news is that we can only improve from here.

As someone who swore on a Bible to maintain order during divine services to the best of my ability, and who will answer to God for this... I must report that what we call "church etiquette" is a wee bit shaky at St. Vladimir. We have a severely undersized church building and I think that this most certainly does not help. Most of us are very thrilled to see each other at services; this is a great thing. We have many small children, again, an absolutely wonderful thing. Saving the chatting for the meal would be ideal, but we are only human. I'm fairly confident that disruptions to services will be minimized after we move into our new building and build new habits. Until then, we must forgive and pray for each other. Perhaps we can help each other do a little better to maintain peace and quiet for those wishing to pray reverently (or preach a homily) without distraction. Please forgive me for not being a better example of punctuality (and other virtues)! God help me.

As we move boldly forward and ask God's blessing for our plans to build a new church and fellowship hall (& kitchen!), we must trust God with our finances - but we also need cohesion as a community and to trust each other, inasmuch as we can as faulty humans beings. As one of the officers of the parish, I'm available and eager to speak with any of you about ways that the parish lay leadership can earn and maintain your trust as we muster our shared resources to grow and develop our parish property, for the glory of God and for future generations of Orthodox Christians.

On that note... Not in words can I properly express my gratitude for the generations who came before me at STV - for all who chipped in their pennies, who gave extravagantly, for the titans of our parish like Konstantin, Igor, Karl, Fr Gregory and others who with their own hands built the church into which I was able to wonder from the pigpen - from the wreckage of western civilization - and find healing for my family, find a Godfather, and find a parish family full of inspiring people striving to live honorable lives in Christ. You prayed for us as we struggled, as we were baptized together as a married couple, as we expected our first beautiful child, then our next. I'm confident that in 2026, our parish members can come together, fund and empower our parish council to continue the St. Vladimir tradition of unlikely success against the forces arrayed against us and to build formidable buildings that hundreds of future 'prodigal sons' will be able to stumble into, buildings where the children of our parish can get married and celebrate, where we can pray and worship, honor our reposed, break bread and feast together, and support each other as we struggle together toward the Heavenly Kingdom. We mustn't fail.

Onward!