

**Rector's Report to the 2015 Annual Assembly  
Priest Gregory Joyce  
March 6, 2016**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Baptisms/Chrismations	14	19	24	17	18	13	14	16	10	17	18	16
Marriages	2	6	5	5	5	2	4	1	4	3	1	2
Funerals	1	2	4	3	3	0	4	4	1	3	6	1
Average Kissing Cross Weekly	71	71	66	73	74	91	91	95	101	117	135	130
Average Communing Weekly	22	23	19	20	24	32	36	41	48	56	61	67
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%
Number of Divine Liturgies				87	94	81	90	93	94	100	122	115
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
Membership	44	47	46	59	71	86	95	110	111	129	129	138

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 a 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. That is not to say we will not build it. With God's help we will!

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 2016 and beyond with this goal in mind!

- Congratulations to all that **our average number of those communing increased in 2015 by 10%**! This is wonderful – let us keep striving to improve this number! In fact, we increased by 9% from 2013 to 2014 – so we are moving in the right direction! The partaking of the Holy Mysteries is an important help to us in our struggle for transfiguration and salvation.
- In 2012 47% of those who kissed the cross at the average Divine Liturgy also partook of Holy Communion. That is an excellent number. In 2013 this number was 48% - even better! In 2014 that number was 45%. This is still good – but I asked our parish family to make a sincere effort to move this number above 50% in 2015 – and you did! In 2015, on average 52% of those who attended the Divine Liturgy partook of Holy Communion. **THIS IS WONDERFUL!!! The Divine Liturgy is served specifically with the Eucharist at its core**. But we cannot rest on our laurels! Let us strive in 2016 to get to 60%. That may seem like a large jump, but if we all make an effort to prepare ourselves and partake of Holy Communion more often we can do it! Let us struggle to prioritize our lives in such a way that we put God first. If we do this, not only will this metric increase, but much more importantly so will each and every one of us grow spiritually.

- **In 2015 the average number of people kissing the cross decreased by about 4%.** The previous year to year comparison was a jump of 20%! I do not know why this is the case, but I can say that we did not do as good a job collecting data this year, and there were frankly a lot of days when we served Divine Liturgy when no data was collected at all. So I am not convinced that we really decreased at all. But I also do not think we increased anywhere near as much as we have in the past. What this means to me is two things: one, that we may have reached the capacity of our facility, (but nonetheless) two, that we need to redouble our efforts to invite friends and loved ones to church, and we need to strengthen our Greeter Ministry. We need more Greeters! Please volunteer to help with this really crucial ministry! And each and every one of us needs to work hard – very hard – to welcome new people to the church. The Greeters are important, but if the Greeters are kind and the rest of us growl at newcomers they will leave. And we will answer for their souls because we couldn't be bothered to show Christ's love to others.
- In 2015 we served 115 Divine Liturgies at St. Vladimir's parish, or one Liturgy every 3.17 days. The year previous was 122 (one Liturgy every 2.99 days), and this was a record for our parish. This small drop can be attributed to the fact that we missed two Liturgies due to priest illness, and the fact that our 122 number from last year contained almost every summer Saturday so that Fr. Joseph Towne could be trained as a priest. If you take out those summer Saturdays from 2014 we in fact increased our number of Liturgies from 2014 to 2015 at St. Vladimir's. 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 sang to those who baked proshpora 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 2015 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.
- **In general we may say that the positive trend in our parish continues:** attendance is solid, communicants are up, the percentage of those communing is up, membership is up and we had the largest number of members in the diocese last year. 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.
- 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 to *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”* (Matthew 28:19-20) May we continue this work for which we have been blessed by God Himself! **Fr. Paul Karas 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!

- We could not be more pleased to have **Fr. Michael Bondar** continue to nourish our parish family this year. Fr. Michael provides great value to our parish through his knowledge of Liturgics, Church Singing, Theology, and of course through the erudite spiritual advice he provides when hearing confessions. We thank Fr. Michael sincerely for helping and guiding us spiritually and we want to affirm publicly what we all feel personally: Fr. Michael is truly an integral part of our parish family and we simply could not do all the things we do here as a parish family without him! Unfortunately Fr. Michael's health took a turn for the worst late last year and he has not been able to join us often since then. I would like to ask our parish family to please remember Fr. Michael in your prayers and ask the Lord first what is best for his salvation, but also, if it is God's will, that he will soon return to us!
- **Deacon Nicholas Olsen** and his family returned to Louisiana this year. They had come to Michigan to head our Downriver Mission, but that did not work out for them. Thus, they came to St. Vladimir's to serve and pray until they were ready to make their next move. In 2015 they decided it was best to go back to Louisiana. We wish them all the best!
- **Deacon Vladimir Pyrozhenko** was ordained for service at St. Vladimir's by Bishop Peter on November 8, 2015. Fr. Vladimir has been a HUGE help to our parish family since his ordination. We should take time here to thank all those that made it possible for us to serve Divine Liturgy for seven consecutive days following Fr. Vladimir's ordination so that he could quickly become accustomed to serving the Divine Liturgy! We also must thank here his family: his wife Alexandra and children Daria, Anthony, Anna, and Alexander 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!
- We are actively recruiting another priest to serve our parish family. As we continue to grow as a parish family we do not want to lose the close-knit feeling of love that has marked our parish since its early days. Having adequate clergymen to care for the spiritual needs of all our parishioners is an important part of preserving this hallmark of our parish. An additional priest will also allow us to serve the Divine Liturgy more often, which is spiritually beneficial for all.
- In addition to another priest, we are also recruiting several singers that could help us with weekday services next year. Our group of weekday singers works very hard – and only for treasure in the next life. They are volunteers and we are very thankful for their work! Two of this group will be leaving after this spring academic semester, Reader Peter Longan and Elizabeth Kiseleva. That still leaves us with a good group, but we need more help! Thus we hope to have one or two young people that are already friends of our parish join us next year to help in this regard. We ask the prayers of our parish family that all flow smoothly to allow us to serve the Divine Services regularly.
- **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.
- Our Choir, Readers, Church School, Youth Group, 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:** Roman Vershynin, Ken Doll, Lilia Vershynin, Ksenia Nikulshina, Konstantin Poplavsky, 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!
- This year, in addition to our Adult Discussion Group we added a Parent Group. This group meets monthly and is very active! We hope to have a Parent Retreat sometime in the spring to deepen the opportunities for spiritual growth this group provides already.
- The Adult Group is struggling quite frankly. Most times in the last year no one has attended. I would like to get your feedback about this. Why do people not find this valuable? I am considering changing this group to an Orthodox Book Club. Perhaps people would find more value in such a group. Please do share thoughts with me in this regard.
- I want to thank Subdeacon Dmitry 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. I also want to thank Yuliya Rodzianko, who in addition to being my personal assistant in the parish oversees our **social media** presence. This is a VERY important ministry and I would like to ask each of you to help Yuliya to the greatest extent you can by sharing pictures, videos, and other interesting and noteworthy items from our parish life with her so she can share them with the world.
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank Subdeacon John Zroika, Subdeacon Methodius Chwastek, Subdeacon Dmitry Kashchenko, Reader Alexander Rusakov, and all **those who serve in the altar** for their service. They add greatly to the service and make it possible for the parish priests 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! Monica Olsen and Lauren Rogers headed up this effort with much assistance from many, many volunteers. The VBS was a wonderful missionary effort and we look forward to another excellent session this summer vacation! Thank you to all who worked so hard on this project!
- 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.

- We have received both Bishop Peter's and Patriarch Kyrill's blessing on the work we are conducting to found an Orthodox Day School here in our parish. The work is hard and there are many temptations. But we see this as a stark sign that we are doing something pleasing to God! This year we have established a Steering Committee headed by Zhanna Skalitzky to help continue to move us in the direction of having the only such school in Michigan. In fact, today Zhanna will leave for Milwaukee to conduct a visit at the Serbian Orthodox School there. We ask your prayers for our continuing work in this regard, and invite your participation in our efforts!
- We would like to establish a schedule to keep St. Vladimir's open every day for at least a few hours. We need volunteers to do this! This will be a very important ministry in welcoming new people to the parish! Please sign up using the sheet circulating throughout the room and please see me if you have any questions!
- 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 especially use help with these duties this year – please contact me if you can help:
  - Help with the Michigan Deanery. This year we will found a mission advisory board for the Deanery. We will also establish a web site for the Deanery. It would be good to increase communication between the clergy within the deanery as well. This volunteer will have a direct impact on the founding of new parishes in Michigan in areas that are unserved or very under-served by the Orthodox Church. In other words, this volunteer will make a real difference in spreading Orthodox Christianity in our state.
  - Help with the Seminary. This year we intend to found a foreign language sector of the seminary, and we may execute a joint agreement with a seminary in the former Soviet Union. Much work is also needed in reinvigorating our Catechist program. If the Michigan Deanery volunteer is successful in helping to found new parishes, then the Seminary volunteer will focus on helping to prepare new clergymen and catechists to spread the faith in our state (and beyond).
- Last, but certainly not least I want to thank our outstanding **Parish Council** and especially Nathan Longan for his remarkable 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!**