

2021 ANNUAL PASTORAL REPORT

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,
Glory to Jesus Christ!

I would like to begin my report with the comforting and inspiring words of our Archpastor, Archbishop Michael, at the beginning of the pandemic:

"How are we as Orthodox Christians to respond to this crisis? Certainly not with fear! Corona-phobia could be as disastrous for us as the virus itself. How many times in the Scripture do we read the words of Our Lord: "Do not be afraid!" Does He not promise us, "I am with you always... even to the very end of the world"?

"Has He not guided the Church through the Bubonic Plague and the Spanish Influenza, two World Wars and countless other conflicts, the Great Depression and several recessions, persecutions and martyrdoms in every generation? This is a time, my beloved, not for fear ... but for FAITH! Perhaps the best approach to these uncertain days are the words of the second-century bishop and martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, who tells us: "Look to the signs of the times ... but then look to the One Who is beyond time" (Letter to Polycarp 3)."

Our Nation, our economy, our people, our faithful and our parishes are suffering, or as our Chancellor, Mitred Archpriest Joseph Likwar said in his Report: "Across America the United States Government imposed multitudes of mandates and a "systems of phases for the reopening of religious institutions and businesses". Churches had to comply with the guidelines for reopening and submit petition for permission to open. The level of contributions in most of our parishes dropped and fundraising income for our parishes was drastically affected."

An additional concern, amidst cautions and precautions, is that there is also the spread of the passion of fear and anger. Passions darken and confuse clarity of mind, and so it is important to not only take reasonable cautions and precautions against threats of physical disease, but also the spiritual disease of impassioned fear and anger. It cannot be overlooked that "erring on the side of caution" is still "erring." It may be wise as a temporary or initial policy, but since experts seem to indicate that we will have this threat for a long time to come, it cannot become a standing policy for the simple fact that no churches will be left to come back to.

In addition to national economic decline during last 12 months of lockdowns during pandemic, there is also the economy of the local church. It is not simply a matter of paying the pastor, for if local closures remain indefinite and extend without objective criteria for reopening, then churches will be unable to reopen. The spiritual harm this would cause is incalculable.

For clergy and parish council, the last 19 months have presented a near-constant array of complex challenges related to shepherding a church during the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest complex challenge is perhaps the trickiest yet: how to prudently resume in-person gatherings, as our parishes began to reopen.

As if the logistical details weren't challenging enough—how to maintain social distance and limit crowd size, whether or not to require masks, to sing or not to sing, what to do with children, how to properly sanitize parish temple and other facilities, and so on—the whole conversation is fraught with potential for division. If a congregation—and within it, a leadership team—is at all a microcosm of our larger society, it will likely contain a broad assortment of strongly held convictions. Some were eager to meet in person and impatient to wait much longer to get back to normal. Others insisted that it's unwise to meet at all until there's a cure. Plenty will fall somewhere in between.

In many parishes, the pandemic has divided members into factions with very different views on how to resume the life of their parish after churches reopen: “The virus is now dividing the parishioners into opening up the churches or to stay in lock down mode. Many believe it is a conspiracy to attack our church, and right to worship. Many think the wearing of face masks, limiting people to come to church, communion spoons, is destroying the church practices. But there are some who are fearful of returning to worship while there is insufficient testing and no sure cure.”

In such a precarious and polarizing environment, how can church move forward in beautiful unity (Ps. 133) rather than ugly division? It won't be easy. But by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit working to unify us in ways our flesh resists, the opportunity is there for us to be a countercultural model for the rest of the world.

What St. Paul urges the Ephesian church, therefore, should be especially urgent for us today: “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1–3).

We would like to highlight the continued work of your parish, during year and a half, when it seems that the whole world came to a halt, due to corona virus. WE HAVE NOT!

The entire church was washed by professional contractors in preparation for repainting our beautiful temple.

Repainting of the whole church was professionally done by another General Contractors company, with experience in repainting churches. That project involved a lot of work on our part – unfastening and removing all the pews, removing all icons from walls, moving all analogions, tetrapod, icon shrines, altar table and table of oblation, not to mention smaller items throughout the church.

Upon completion of repainting of the church proper, and by the unanimous decision of our parish council, we have undertaken and completed repainting of our social hall.

After repainting of the hall, the entire facility downstairs was scrubbed, washed and waxed. That included the hall, the kitchen, Sunday school classroom, stairs, landings, bathrooms, and common-use surfaces, the entire facility was disinfected with high grade professional MPC A2Z disinfectant cleaner, as recommended by CDC.

Beautification and repairs in our Parish Cemetery were completed. This included fixing and repairs of multiple monuments and tombstones, some of which were lopsided, some broken, and some fallen over. Some of those stones are from 1800's, and we know that it is our responsibility, as a parish family, to show our love to fathers and mothers, children and even grandchildren who fell asleep in the Lord.

Replacement of our old and inefficient air-conditioning system, with new and energy efficient Mitsubishi System, that is whisper quiet and Eco-friendly, capable of cooling the square footage of the church proper was completed. In addition to air-conditioning, new system removes humidity and dust and dirt particles, soot and pollen, and makes air healthy to breathe. This project, in addition to making our air in the church healthier and temperatures comfortable, will also help to preserve the beauty and cleanliness of our newly repainted church, iconostas, shrines, mosaics, icons and other sacred articles, so generously and lovingly donated by our people.

In addition, new gutters and downspouts were installed on the Rectory and the garage, and new commercial washer and new gas stove top installed in the parish house.

New shrubbery planted in front of the Rectory, and new white landscaping stones added around parish house. Trees around house and garage were trimmed and several were cut down.

New steel garage doors were installed on the garage and new security lights and motion sensors were installed on North, East and South sides of church.

Parking lot sections were repaired and cracks were sealed throughout the parking lot, and new white landscaping stones were added around the church.

The church kitchen was completely cleaned and sanitized and new flushometer installed in ladies' room.

Several large trees were cut down and branches and brush were trimmed in our Cemetery and more graves were repaired.

Our thanks to our maintenance committee under direction of Dick Sura, Dave Williams and volunteers, that keep our church functional, clean and beautiful, throughout the year, in addition to the tremendous amount of work on larger and capital project.

Our parish council and bake sale committee have carefully reviewed our Easter and Christmas Bake Sales and determined to continue to conduct our bake sales by "drive-through pick up" method. The entire process was redesigned and customers were instructed to pick up their baked goods orders, while remaining in their cars.

Our parking lot was reconfigured with red traffic cones and yellow "caution" tape, as well as large signs for entrance and exit, to ensure safety and smooth flow of cars. Names of customers (who remained in their cars) were taken, transmitted to our hall, processed downstairs and taken up to the cars by "runners", payments were received and recorded by designated cashiers in the foyer by the elevator. Moneys were double counted and recorded at the end of the day, and were reconciled by computer entry following day, and deposited in the bank. Our thanks to all volunteers (especially young "runners") who made these important events possible. Some deliveries to home bound and nursing home residents were made. Thank you to our drivers! Special thanks go to our president, vice – president, treasurer and workers for tremendous efforts in planning, executing and inspiring our "drive-through" bake sales, and to all the volunteers who worked at the bake sessions!

We are profoundly grateful to our parishioners and friends for their generosity and continued financial commitment to our parish, as stewards of our church. An incredible amount of good works during these difficult times is only possible due to your continued and faithful generosity!

I would like to thank for their selfless and sacrificial service Fr. Timm Holowatch, Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov, all of our Deacons, Subdeacons, Readers and altar servers who enable us to expand our services and outreach ministries in our parish and beyond. Thank you and God bless you for your love and service to our people!

Thanks to our Sunday school coordinators, volunteer teachers and staff, as well as parents, for being responsible and active, and all parishioners that truly make our youth a priority in the church! May God bless you and reward you with manifold riches for your love for our kids, especially during pandemic!

Thanks to our choir who make all our services so beautiful, to our hard workers of bake sales, fundraisers, educational, and social activities that throughout the year work with outstanding commitment and love; to all volunteers of our outreach ministries - God sees your love and giving - you will hear the promised words of our Lord: "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

And finally, I express our gratitude to our parish council and its president Joe Darling for their faithfulness, love, kindness, stewardship, and for enabling and facilitating proper Christian functioning of our parish on day-to-day basis, and for their labors of love during past and extremely challenging year, and to all of our beloved parishioners and friends for your generosity, faithfulness and support! May God grant you all Many Years!

Be assured of my prayer that the Lord will bless you, your families, and your loved ones with the light of His presence during this holy season and throughout the New Year.

With love in Christ,

Fr. Alexey