

## 2022 ANNUAL PASTORAL REPORT

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In the midst of global economic and political uncertainty, in a time of disharmony, disunity and wars, in the fleeting time of our life on earth, we begin to recognize our own mortality. We recognize that what matters in life is not wealth, fame, or status, but how well we loved each other – what difference we made in a life of those less fortunate than us.

Through the leadership of our parish, both clergy and lay, we consciously chose to pattern our life as a Christian family on that of the First Church at Jerusalem, as recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles 2:42:47. First Christians “continued steadfastly in Apostles’ doctrine and in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

This, my dear brothers and sisters, is what we as a parish are called to be and to do by God. We are called to worship God, have fellowship with each other, to edify each other, minister to all, and evangelize all around us – sojourning through an ever-changing environment, offering those seeking healing – a new and eternal life!

The life and work of God in a parish community is never completed or perfected. The life and work of God in an individual’s life is never completed or perfected. While there is a wide continuum of Orthodox Christians who are not actively engaged in the life of the parish - to those who are very engaged, it is the special work of the local parish to invite, to encourage, to promote a living Christian faith among all our people.

Our real goal is not to get people to come to church, but to teach people how to be the church. How to be the church is something altogether different — to be in love with God, to be in love with life, to be happy and to be fulfilled, to know hope in the ups and downs of life, to be content, to be less materialistic and more altruistic. There are very practical and beneficial results in being the church.

It is the work of the local parish, our parish, that I want to highlight in this annual report.

What does it mean to “be the church”? Each week we come together bringing with us our burdens and cares, our hopes and dreams, our strengths and gifts. Together we give thanks for our blessings and offer prayer for our needs. Joined together at the Table of the Lord, we share the one Body and one Blood of Christ. And then we go out as “the church” and share what we have received with the world.

Throughout each year we have a very active liturgical life where clergy and laity join together in praising and worshiping Christ, experiencing the life of God's Kingdom here and now. We celebrate a complete Great Lent, Paschal, Nativity, and Theophany cycles; Major and Minor Feasts, Baptisms, Chrismations, Weddings, Anniversary and Healing Prayer services, Blessing of houses, Soul Saturdays, Funerals, Panikhidas (memorial services), Blessing of the Cemetery and of the graves, in addition to the Divine Liturgies, Great Vespers and Matins.

The backbone of our common worship is in our singing. The amount of work that goes into preparing the services is substantial. Materials need to be collected, collated, printed and organized for the choir. Not one service is the same as another, so preparation needs to be made for every single service. This is done for daily, weekly, festal and Lenten services as well. In addition to the material, the choir itself practices frequently to bring the worship of heaven to our community. And even more, they are often called to provide their voices and time for some services that come up for particular needs, such as funerals and weddings.

In our parish, books are often either created or purchased to facilitate these services. These books are provided for not only the choir, but also the readers, clergy, parishioners and altar servers. Tremendous amounts of time are required for the preparation of these various resources. And because our worship is structured after heavenly

worship, and therefore must not only be beautiful but orderly, all of our books and handouts must contain the same texts and music.

In Heaven, the Lord sits on his throne and is surrounded by elders and servers at the holy altar. In our parish, we are blessed with several priests, deacons, subdeacons, and other clergy, who are joined by a multitude of altar servers. Because of the several priests, we are able to provide a full schedule of services and ministries for our parish, community and our Diocese. The altar servers spend many hours throughout the year learning about their roles, practicing, attending retreats and serving with the Diocesan Bishop. This is one way in which we are providing for the future of the church.

All of these services, events and ministries take place in our beautiful church that is lovingly maintained and beautified which in itself is a great feat of love, effort, and dedicated labor by volunteers, expertly coordinated by Dick Sura, Dave Williams and volunteers. In addition to the parish church and the rectory, parking lots, driveways, lawns and bushes, outstanding care is provided for our departed loved ones in our parish cemetery.

Throughout the year, the church, hall, Sunday School rooms and library/board room is cleaned, vacuumed and washed on a weekly basis. During Lenten and Paschal seasons, this is done multiple times each week. The above involves cleaning, painting, fixing and repairing the heating equipment, air conditioners, lighting fixtures, kitchen equipment, refrigerators and freezers; additionally, the exterior lawns and greenery are lovingly maintained. For the holiday seasons of Nativity and Pascha, the church is lovingly and beautifully decorated with Christmas trees, seasonal decorations, and flowers. The maintenance and beautification of our church and parish properties requires incredible effort from the entire parish community. This is clearly evident and commented upon by visitors to our parish.

Our catechetical and adult education, as well as our Bible Studies have continued, thanks to our Reader John Koch, and individually with Fr. Alexey and Fr. Timm. We're truly blessed and are appreciative of wonderful inspirational messages, especially during this past year.

As Reader John pointed out numerous times, this is a time for solidarity and self-sacrifice. These times will give us each an opportunity to grow and put into practice the way of life which Christ taught us to live, seeding the ground for the new life that accompanies His grace into the world. If we take these steps – staying connected to one another and staying committed to our Lord – then we will rejoice together as Christians and a family of Faith.

The support that our parish provides in spiritual and pastoral care and counseling is desperately needed by so many in today's society. Liturgical worship is continually offered - and between private and corporate services we celebrate 5 to 7 times each week throughout the year and upwards of 20 times per week during Lenten and Memorial seasons of the Church year; and the education is a life-long pursuit, since no one ever finishes learning about the Orthodox Faith and God.

We work hard on making our parish to be a place where love reigns. For scripture tells us "God is Love". (1 John 4:8) The life and the story we have to share with others is the story of God's love as seen in His incarnate Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our parish is a place where the clergy seek to love the people God has entrusted to their care, and where the people of God, themselves, seek to love their leaders and each other. It must be a place where forgiveness reigns and not judgment. It must be a place where the members of the body of Christ are encouraged to discover their gifts and to use them to God's glory. It must be a place where rendering kindness to another is a rule, not an exception. It is what every single person hunger for – a place to love and a place to be loved. This is what we are - the family of God.

Through the leadership of our parish, our people are empowered to lead in those areas where it is appropriate for them to do so. Parishioners are being equipped, taught, supported, mentored and motivated to assist clergy in parish leadership. Not every priest is able or even competent to make every decision in a parish; parishioners with leadership skills can work with and even complement the priest in various leadership roles. Because of this co-shared leadership ministry, our parish is structured to function competently and effectively.

The parish council, committees, and ministries actually get things done, rather than lurch from one confused moment to the next. This in turn strengthens the sense of the parish as an intimate community. Isolation is the biggest social fear among people today. Through our leadership's concerted efforts our parish became a place where people do feel attached, involved, integrated and assimilated. In that we also try to live out the New Testament Commandment that Christ has given us – that we love one another.

Throughout all of our labors and efforts, we must remain mindful that we are stewards of the Gospel and affirm that every aspect of our lives comes as a gift from God Himself. Outreach calls on the faithful to cheerfully offer back to God a portion of the gifts with which they have been blessed.

In addition to our charitable work, we have strived to support our parish through fundraisers and bake sales, which require an incredible number of hours of sacrificial labor in preparation and execution.

We must always be mindful of our high calling as Orthodox Christians to be good stewards of our parish through our time, talents and treasures. It is through offering back these gifts to the work and ministries of the parish that we show our faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic ministry of His Church. The snapshot of a year in the life of our parish has to be maintained and funded through the generosity of those of us who choose to cultivate this community and make it a beacon for the life in Christ to ourselves and to the wider community.

Incredible sacrificial giving and monetary support is evident, not only in the financial reports of the Treasurer, but in the abundance of what we as a parish are able to accomplish throughout the year in each and every one of these aspects of our life as a spiritual family.

I want to offer special thanks and gratitude to the clergy, our dedicated Parish Council, educators, singers and readers, under the direction of Matushka Tatiana Khalimonov, and all the volunteers who makes us grateful and proud to be members of this wonderful parish.

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 Joe Darling and Nancy Kulikowski, 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 youths!

Thanks to our choir who make all our services so beautiful, to our Sr. R Club chapter, whose involvement in the church life and outreach ministries is growing every year, to our maintenance committee under direction of Dick Sura, Dave Williams and volunteers that keep our church functional, clean and beautiful, to our growing number of hard workers of bake sales, dinners, and other fundraisers 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, our President Joe Darling, and our outgoing Treasurer Dave Williams 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 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